NEW POEMS

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NEW POEMS

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ON VIOL AND FLUTE: Lyrical Poems. Second Edition. 1876.

KING ERIK: a Tragedy. 1876.

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NEW POEMS

BY

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TO

MY FRIEND

HAMO THORNYCROFT

SCULPTOR

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PROEM.

If thou disdain the sacred Muse,
Beware lest Nature, past recall,
Indignant at that crime, refuse
Thee entrance to her audience-hall,
Beware lest sea, and sky, and all
That bears reflection of her face
Be blotted with a hueless pall
Of unillumined commonplace.

The moving heavens, in rhythmic time,
Roll, if thou watch them or refrain;
The waves upon the shore in rhyme
Beat, heedless of thy loss or gain:

Not they, but thou, hast lived in vain,
If thou art deaf and blind and dumb,
Parched in the heart of morning rain,
And on the flaming altar numb.

Ah! desolate hour when that shall be,
When dew and sunlight, rain and wind,
Shall seem but trivial things to thee,
Unloved, unheeded, undivined;
Nay, rather let that morning find
Thy molten soul exhaled and gone,
Than in a living death resigned
So darkly still to labour on.

THE GIFTS OF THE MUSES.

Against a platan's root,
Blowing a rustic flute,
Young Daphnis lay, the careless herdsman blithe ;
His nervous fingers ran
Along the tuneful span,
While languor held his well-shaped limbs and lithe ;
Down on his head there rained in wayward flight
A sparkling shower of green reflected light.

He piped an oaten strain
Of math and loaded wain,
Of harvest-triumphs drawn along the vales ;
Of songs of wood and hill,
The frail cicala shrill,
And shepherds challenging the nightingales,
Of heifers straying among orchard fruits,
And wanton kids that gnaw the fig-tree shoots.

Thoughts of this simple kind
Held all his pastoral mind,
Unlearned in the painful lore of life,
Song and the flute's bright sound
Gilded his rustic round
Of works and ways, with nature ne'er at strife ;
No waters fling their snows down mossy heights
More joyously than he his lyric flights.

Beside him, in the shade,
Stood tall a rosy maid,
The sweet Lycoris of the glistering hair ;
From baskets hung hard by,
She piled an altar high
With woodland rites and many an artless prayer,
Laid roses on it to the Muses nine,
And laurel to the Pythian more divine.

Then soon, her offering done,
She rested from the sun,
Leaning her locks against a leopard's hide ;
While Daphnis in a dream
Let slip away the stream
Of flute-notes, till their echo wholly died ;
Brown head by golden and brown limbs by white,
Sleep folded round them both its noon-delight.

But while in sleep they lie,
The Muses wander by,
Serene and stately, with their robes of song;
The dewy flowers they found,
And rustic altar crowned
With homely gifts that did their godhead wrong,
Yet smiled and took them, turned and smiled again
To find their suppliants in a drowsy vein.

Between them passed a sign,
And one among the Nine
Lift up the shepherd's roughly-carven flute,
And from Lycoris' breast
Turned back the saffron vest,
And, signalling her sisters to be mute,
Took thence the humble amulet that lay
Close by that virgin heart's pure swing and sway.

And then they passed from sight,
Far up the hills of light,
Seeking their sire in many an upland lair,—
With voices hushed and low,
Lest he should come and go,—
Shivering to feel the laurel-scented air,—
Trembling lest every stir of wind and tree
Should lightly turn to music and be He.

But soon, on the cool ground,
Lycoris woke and found
An opal burning on her zoneless breast,
And sought in vain to find
The ring her mother kind
Kissed every night before she bade her rest;
New hopes sprang up, new passions dim and wild,
She rose bewildered and no more a child.

Out of that shining glade
Slow passed the dreaming maid,
And sought a pool, still as a wingless thought,
So pensively she fared,
A drinking hart was scared,
And woodwards fled, and yet she knew it not ;
Intent in her own imaged form to find
The answering echo of her wakening mind.

And, bending o'er the wave,
The mirrored shape it gave
Was taller, fairer than her memory knew ;
From virgin coif to hem
The god's gift of the gem
Flashed mellow radiance, beaming through and through
Till, shrinking back a little in distress,
She blushed, oppressed with her own loveliness.

But soon her pride returned,
And o'er the pool she burned,
Glowing with pleasure at her own fair face,
And thought no more of him
Who, through the forest dim,
Was fain to vaunt her earlier simple grace ;
Who now lay dreaming, while his fingers missed
The pipe he often in her praise had kissed.

So, idly wandering,
She met a conquering king,
High-charioted and garlanded with bays ;
And, from his fiery hand,
Took queenship of the land,
And sat, his consort, through her length of days,
Far-famed for peerless beauty, and the frost
Of glittering pomp when love and hope are lost.

But Daphnis, too, distraught,
In wakening hands had caught
No rustic flute rough-hewn of beech-wood light,
But, past his whole desire,
A massive ivory lyre,
Gold-strung and meet to hymn a king's delight ;
As if a snake had made his hand its nest,
He thrust the plectrum from his throbbing breast.

But soon the sighing chords,
Half whispered into words,
Decoyed his fancy with their wayward charm ;
Subtle the notes, and strange
With mystic interchange
Of tones that might the wildest heart disarm.
He stooped to take the lovely breathing lyre,
And, as he touched it, all his soul took fire.

He tries a pastoral lay
Of goats that tramp in play,
And mar the treasures of the thrifty bee ;
But ah ! do what he can
He peals a hymn to Pan,
And wakes the woods with dulcet harmony ;
Prophetic strains to none before revealed
Pour out in music from his lips unsealed.

Then he arose and went,
Like one on mission sent,
Through many a vine-hung village of white walls ;
Singing from door to door,
As never sang before
The deftest minstrel under coronals,—
His hair unbound, a common shepherd lad,
But for a certain majesty he had.

Maidens and youths began
To haunt the tuneful man,
Following his lyre and him from town to town,
And oft when noon was hot,
In some secluded spot,
The bard would turn and bid them all lie down,
And then, while in the pine-tops sighed the wind,
Some thrilling tale of passion he would find.

His praises flew before ;
Men hailed him more and more ;
They loaded him with garlands and with gold ;
Some prayed him to abide
Still in that country-side,
A princely office in the state to hold ;
He thanked them, and with level glance severe
Passed on ; and they were dumb with shame and fear.

For yet with all his fame
Some secret inward flame
Fretted his heart, and made him grave and sad ;
There was no joy or rest
In that god-haunted breast ;
A grand but melancholy face he had,
And women gazing as he passed them by
Drew back, lest they should meet his glance and die.

High up a mountain-side,
Aweing the champaign wide,
The crowning city of that land is set ;
Olive and poplar meet
Along its sun-white street,
And o'er the joyous folk their branches fret.
Against the myrtles, dark above the town,
The palace of an ancient line looks down.

And Daphnis comes at last,
After long years are past,
To smite his lyre before the victor king ;
The people shout and crowd,
And call his name aloud,
Great poet, first of all that chaunt and sing !
He heeds them not, nor bows his lovely head,
But steps like Orpheus through the gibbering dead.

About his hair he sets
A wreath of violets,
Tears out the cooling lilies from his lyre,
Reaches the palace door,
And treads the marble floor,
And wins the inmost chamber, fairer, higher,
Where deep transparent shadows fall and meet
Around the despot on his porphyry seat.

They gave him ear for song ;
The courtiers, in a throng,
Applauded lightly when the feat was o'er ;
The king, more apt and wise,
Vowed, by the Titan's eyes,
No loftier ode had reached his sense before,
And shouting, swore, for rapture so divine,
The queen herself should pour a meed of wine.

So, with cool fingers white,
She poured, like rosy light,
The sparkling wine that laughed to see the sun ;
Gravely she gazed at him
Across the twinkling brim,
And praised the victory over music won,
Nor drooped the lids of her large eyes nor sank,
When from her hand he took the bowl and drank.

'O more than queen,' he cried,
'Ripe to be deified,
The godhead blossoms in those eyes and lips!
Each minor mortal star
Thou dost excel as far
As must this opal other gems eclipse!'
She shuddered inwardly, she knew not why,
And silence fell, and they gazed eye to eye.

So memory stirred in each,
As, o'er a tideless beach,
Some wandering wind may ape the loud sea-wave;
Then, in a moment's space,
Faded from either face
The shade of shades that dim remembrance gave.
She was a queen, erect and fair and cold,
And he a singer to be fee'd with gold.

Forth from that house he went,

With face and shoulders bent,

Burdened with song and faint with vague desire ;

Across the glaring street

He passed, on faltering feet,

Into the temple of the Delian Sire,

And while the priests around him wondered, he

Poured out strange prayer to their great deity.

'Bitter the laurel leaf ;

And harsh the barley-sheaf,

Dipped in the blood of Niobe for wine ;

More sad than any tears

The weight of rhythmic years ;

More fierce than fire the light upon the shrine ;

More tense the bow, more fell the shafts by far

Than Love's light arrows, though they poisoned

are.

'Love hath no part in me,
And hopes before me flee,
As from Narcissus fled his own fair face ;
The morning breaks in vain,
No pleasure and no pain
Its bodiless hours can on my being trace :
I am but as thy lyre ! Oh ! let there start
Immortal music from this hopeless heart.'

And then, uplift anew,
He passed that priesthood through,
And sought the light, fading to eventide,
Within the broad white square
Stood, flushed with roseate air,
While folk came crowding round from far and wide,
Then made great music to their hearts' delight,
Till the stars gathered fire and it was night.

And so from year to year,
Like some high upland drear,
His lofty spirit and lonely watched the skies,
While still his lips and hands
Wrung wonder from all lands,
Praise found no echo in his changeless eyes ;
Like dawn-struck Memnon by Nile's lonely shore,
He poured his music and was stone once more.

But when his heart was old,
The people brought their gold,
And hewed out marble from the mountains hoar ;
Under their hands arose,
Slow, as a cedar grows,
A glorious palace on the south sea-shore,
And there, with slaves and perfumes and fair weather,
He and his lyre were sorrowful together.

One night—so legends say—
The ancient poet lay,
Scaring faint sleep with many a weary thought,
When, through the pillared gold,
The curtains, fold on fold,
Blew out as though a wind for entrance sought,
And all the fragrant lamps were dimly stirred
Though no one moved and not a sound was heard.

Then, through the deepening night,
Clouding the lamps with light,
Into that house the radiant Pythian came ;
The majesty he had
Was self-illumed, and clad
In naked beauty like a rose-red flame.
He spake and smiled ; so keen, so fierce, so fair,
His voice was like a sword and cleft the air.

'Ah! poet, ah! my son,
What meed hast thou not won,
Renowned for song through all my spacious realm!
Ask now thy best desire;
I swear, on lips of fire,
My bounty shall thy wishes overwhelm!
Ask what thou wilt; a god before thee stands,
With all earth's honours heaped upon his hands.'

And Daphnis made reply:
'See at thy feet I lie,
All fame concentres in this brilliant hour;
Honours enough, and praise
Have crowned my length of days,
Yet that was but the bud and this the flower;
Give me no more; but let me dumbly rest,
Within thy radiance intimately blest.

'Yet one request I have,
And one desire to crave,
Since thy serenest godhead holds my fate,
Give back the homely flute,
Now long disused and mute,
The sovereign Muses stole to make me great ;
And oh ! my master, take this lyre again,
With all its passion, all its weight of pain ! '

But when the full dawn broke,
And Daphnis stirred nor spoke,
The slaves in fear drew back the veils' eclipse ;
There on the stately bed
The ancient bard lay dead,
A smile still hovering on his curvèd lips :
The lyre they found not, but his fingers tight
Were closed upon a flute of beech-wood light.

THE SISTERS.

A DORIAN IDYL.

PHILENION. LYSIDICE.

LYSIDICE.

Dearest, the onyx lamp is at thy side,
The vine-surrounded casement open wide,
And on the floor's mosaic I have set
Green sprigs of rue and buds of serpolet,
And still the rain upon their leaves is wet.
Farewell, farewell, and sing thyself to sleep.

PHILENION.

I fear my dreams will scarce be long or deep.

LYSIDICE.

Ah ! let me close you, burning eyes and blue !
Melt to a cloud, and film yourselves in dew,
Else must I kiss you under either brow !

PHILENION.

I ought to soothe myself to slumber now
Were kisses poppies or oblivion love !

LYSIDICE.

Yea, soon behind our dear pomegranate grove
The large slow-footed moon will glide and set,
And all the world its weariness forget.

PHILENION.

Bow down once more that little curly head,
And lay those soft arms on the saffron bed ;
Among the trees, and where the shade is deep,
Who comes to-night when all the world's asleep ?

LYSIDICE.

Oh, hush! he will not see me, will not know
That I can hear his footfall there below.

PHILENION.

And while thou listenest for his wandering feet,
May I not also keep my vigil, sweet?

LYSIDICE.

Thou hast no reason, dear, to lie awake;
I seek to sleep but cannot for love's sake.
Ah, who has told thee that he comes at night?
I hardly told my heart my heart's delight.
He never sees, he never hears me there,
I lie, with fluttering pulse, till unaware
His presence seems to quicken all the air.
Is he not god-like, dear Philenion?
Like Paris when the triple deity shone

Around his face and shoulders in a flame?
Like great Adonis when the Cyprian came
And flushed him with embraces? Ah! that smile!
I fain for shame must hide my face awhile!
Ah! pity me for love's sake,—since thy breast
Has no such reason for a sick unrest.

PHILENION.

Dear child, young love thinks ever it knows best,
And I seem old to thee, and past my time,
Five years, forsooth, beyond thy budding prime.

LYSIDICE.

Last morn he came, and with his arms he led
A new-washed lamb with roses round its head;
He seemed to mean the lovely gift for me,
But blushed too much my blushing face to see—
How sweet it is to tell thee all my woe.

PHILENION.

Speak on, nor heed, love, that I tremble so.

LYSIDICE.

I stole up towards him when his flocks lay down
From stress of noontide on the pastures brown ;
Before him flashed a distant streak of sea,
Behind him rose a whispering tamarisk-tree.
I listened close, and, sister, ere he set
The laughing calathus his lips to wet,
His eyes were sparkling, and—it might not be—
I thought he whispered low 'Lysidice!'

PHILENION.

Behind that tree, and where the olives throw
A silver shadow on the leaves below,
Say, hast thou been?

LYSIDICE.

Yea, where the boughs divide
And show, half nestled in the dim hill-side
A noiseless and untrampled place of tombs.
Thou weepest, sister, for the lamp illumes
The shining fringes of those sweetest eyes?

PHILENION.

Ah! child, thou knowest not what sorrow lies
In memory; thou art rich in thy to-day,
Let me go silent on a sadder way.

LYSIDICE.

A burning tear has dropped upon my hand.
Have I done ill? I cannot understand!

PHILENION.

Among the graves that fill that olive shade
I wandered once, just such a joyous maid

As thou. Within my circling hands I held
A young cicala, who, by song impelled,
Struck with his feet the cithern of his wings ;
I laughed, inspired by all the amorous things
The sacred creature hinted, till I threw
Backward my head, and caught against the blue
A man's keen face that looked me through and through.

LYSIDICE.

Let me come nearer, for you whisper low.

PHILENION.

I spread my fingers, let the wild wings go,
Sprang to my feet, and would have fled, but he
Was swifter, and his arms encompassed me.
Beneath the shade he wooed my fears away,
And showed the channel where his shallop lay ;
He lived upon the seas. Oh ! strange and sweet
To sit at Aphrodite's awful feet !

Next morn I stole, and laid across her shrine
A fillet of these wine-dark locks of mine,
An ivy wreath, a grasshopper in gold.
She rose from out the tingling foam and cold;
She rules it still, and when I heard the roar
Of distant waves I prayed to her the more,
But all in vain.

LYSIDICE.

I too—but, sister, swear,
Reveal to none at all my foolish care,—
I, too, before the dawn to-day hung up
In Aphrodite's shrine my silver cup
Engraved with massy combats of old kings.

PHILENION.

I pray the gods that with all pleasant things
Thy life at all times may be crowned and blest,

May all the sweets into thy cup be pressed
That the sad gods forgot in mixing mine.

LYSIDICE.

Tell me what end came of this love of thine?

PHILENION.

There is but one fixed goal where love may fare
And every lover that the world shall bear ;
After brief space or lengthened, weal or woe,
They downward and in solitude must go
Where the Queen sits with poppies round her hair.
Brief was our time for passion, scant and rare
The hours of pleasure in my life have been.
One chill October night when airs were keen,
And I within the quiet house began
To clear the soft white spinning wool a span
Forth from my knees, and thou wert bent to hold
The oil-press slowly oozing liquid gold,

Silent, before the fire, we two alone,
There came out of the dark a wailing moan,—
His voice in vision,—and I rose, but thou
Heard'st nothing, and knew'st nothing of my woe.
I felt that far away at sea his breath
Had called on mine at the last hour of death,
And through the thundering foam and roaring tide,
My heart had heard the whisper as he died.
Yea, Aphrodite, to whom sea-wives pray,
Had heard my prayer in her own mystic way.

LYSIDICE.

Sweetest, I dare not look into thine eyes,
So pure and sad, so tender and so wise ;
What shall I do to make thy heart forget
My foolish hardness ? See, my cheeks are wet
With passionate falling of remorseful tears.

PHILENION.

Thou hast the spring-tide lightness of thy years,
Sister ! Behold, my arms are open wide,
Those vain reproaches in this bosom hide !
Dream not that life has lost all bliss for me,
Content to love and live again in thee.
Fair throbbing head, and flowing wealth of tress,
Alive in its own glancing loveliness,
Soft neck, warm hands, and best of all, I know,
Clear virgin heart fast beating down below,
These are my loves, and till that sacred hour
When Love shall crown thee with his mother's flower,
And I into the strong hands of a man
Shall give thee, as a sister only can,
These are my care, and all my life shall be
Absorbed in conquering thy destiny ;
What woes the gods may for our heads prepare
With cheerful countenance and instant prayer

I will prevail that I alone may bear.
But when that day of days at last shall dawn
When underneath the platan on the lawn
Our hands suspend the wreath of dripping buds,
Your lotos-garland, starred with multitudes
Of nuptial blossoms steeped in rich perfume,
When all the maidens throng to view the room
Along whose walls the town's best art provides
Sweet amorous stories incident to brides,
When crowned with hyacinths, a chorus loud,
The virgins chaunt thy praises in a crowd,
And only hush, when on the ground they pour
The fragrant oil, one last libation more,
Then, darling, oh ! may I be there to weep
Still tears of ecstasy that downward creep,
May holy Cypris round thy body twine
The sacred girdle of her charm divine,
And then may Love, all swallowed up in thee,
Forget, yea ! even in dreams, to visit me.

THE LOST LYRE.

In what deep forest, old and hoar,
Untracked, unechoed evermore,
Lies wreathed in leaves the ivory lyre
That Orpheus bore?
For surely still a holy fire
Its chords respire!

Ah! would that I, with eyes cast down,
Might thread those solemn paths and brown,
Where endless autumn pines for aye;
That moony crown
Would win my feet to stir and stray
On the right way.

Till, stooping in that murmurous land,
The wonder in my trembling hand
Should quiver like a breathing thing,
And, lightly fanned,
Each tremulous immortal string
Bid me to sing.

And I should sing ; and round me then
All mild-eyed beasts and savage men
Would gather softly to adore ;
The lion's den
Stand empty ; and the sullen shore
Forget to roar.

But swift before a sunset breeze,
Across the dolphin-haunted seas,
My lyre and I would seek the dim
Hesperides,
Where fainting crimsons overbrim
The low sky's rim.

For why should men again refuse
The lyre's reward, the poet's dues,
Should Hebrus bleed again, or hear
A shrieking Muse?
Nay! we should spurn the upland drear,
And seaward steer.

For lo! what joy could be to sing
To idle men a mystic thing
High-poised above their ken or care?
Let Atys ring
His shriller cymbal in mid-air,
While forth we fare.

Forth ere the film of living fire
Can fade above the dim white lyre,
Before the sacred chords grow slack,
Ere men can tire
Of holy song, or tempests' wrack
Can wave us back.

O fruitless dream ! our pensive age
Hath hopelessness for heritage,
Satiety of song for meed,
And for the rage
Of lyric prophets born to bleed,
A broken reed.

A broken reed, and only fit
For song to make a flute of it,
To pipe her memories of time past ;
The sad airs flit
Across its wounded side ; 'tis cast
Away at last.

BY THE RIVER.

The limpid water passes,
And whispers at our feet,
The worn-out leaves and grasses
The west wind's voice repeat ;
They say the summer goes
In music to its close.

The beech-woods high above us
Pour down from breezy air,—
As if in proof they love us,—
Deep shadow debonair ;
They hang aloft and find
The last faint streams of wind.

Below our feet the river,
With its old weedy smell,
Pursues its bent for ever,
With no new tale to tell ;
Its reeds will quiver on
Till Time is dead and gone.

And where last year the lily,
Unfolding its green bowl,
Hung in the water stilly
Its contemplative soul,
A younger flower as fair
Has felt the autumn air.

In this enchanted leisure
The only restless thing
Is one loose ray of azure,
A dragon-fly on wing ;
The rustling of its flight
Is like the sound of light.

I hold your hand, and wonder,
My dear, if all be true ;
Can no power part asunder
When Love makes one of two ?
The powers of nature say
In flower and shadow 'Nay !'

Then with the river's blessing,
And the wood's solemn prayer,
And this soft wind caressing
Our foreheads and our hair,
Without a word or sign
Lay your sweet mouth to mine.

And if I faint to feel it,—
My weak heart beating high,—
O haste and press, to seal it,
Another lest I die ;
The second kiss will give
Me strength, and I shall live.

So when the years before us
Pass slowly one by one,
Till all the gifts they bore us
Are ripe beneath the sun,
When we are old and sere
Like corn in russet ear,—

Do thou, my love, remember
The sweet still autumn day,
When time was in September,
But passion scarce in May,
While in a golden dream
We lay beside the stream ;

When all bright hours are over
That make such speed to pass,
Forget not thine old lover,
The sunshine and the grass ;
O let not memory miss
That first enchanted kiss.

THE FARM.

Far in the soft warm west
There lies an orchard-nest,
Where every spring the black-caps come,
And build themselves a downy home.

The apple-boughs entwine,
And make a network fine
Through which the morning vapours pass
That rise from off the dewy grass.

And when the spring-warmth shoots
Along the apple roots,
The gnarled old boughs grow full of buds
That gleam and leaf in multitudes.

And then, first cold and white,
Soon flushing with delight,
The blossom-heads come out and blow,
And mimic sunset-tinted snow.

Just where my farm-house ends
A single gable bends,
And one small window, ivy-bound,
Looks into this enchanted ground.

I sit there while I write,
And dream in the dim light
That floods the misty orchard through,
A pale-green vapour tinged with blue.

And watch the growing year,
The flowers that spring and peer,
The apple-bloom that melts away,
The colours of the changing day.

The falling blossom fills
The cups of daffodils,
That loll their perfume-haunted heads
Along the feathery parsley-beds.

And then the young girls come
To take the gold flowers home;
They stand there, laughing, lilac-white,
Within the orchard's green twilight.

The rough old walls decay,
And moulder day by day,
The fern-roots tear them, stone by stone,
The ivy drags them, overgrown;

But still they serve to keep
This little shrine of sleep
Intact for singing birds and bees
And lovers no less shy than these.

Soft perfumes blown my way
Remind me day by day
How spring and summer flowers arrange
Their aromatic interchange.

For, in the still warm night,
I taste the faint delight
Of dim white violets that lie
Far down in depths of greenery.

And from the wild white rose
That in my window blows,
At dawn an odour pure and fine
Comes drifting like the scent of wine.

I live in flower and tree ;
My own life seems to me
A fading trifle scarcely worth
The notice of the jocund earth.

Nor seems it strange indeed
To hold the happy creed
That all fair things that bloom and die
Have conscious life as well as I.

That not in vain arise
The speedwell's azure eyes,
Like stars upon the river's brink,
That shine unseen of us, and sink.

That not for Man is made
All colour, light and shade,
All beauty ripened out of sight,—
But to fulfil its own delight.

The black-caps croon and swing
Deep in the night, and sing
No songs in which man's life is blent,
But to embody their content.

Then let me joy to be
Alive with bird and tree,
And have no haughtier aim than this
To be a partner in their bliss.

So shall my soul at peace
From anxious carping cease,
Fed slowly like a wholesome bud
With sap of healthy thoughts and good.

That when at last I die,
No praise may earth deny,
But with her living forms combine
To chant a threnody divine.

AT DAWN.

All night I tossed without one hour of sleep,
Lamenting for the sweet bride torn from me ;
But now that in the glimmering east I see
The saffron-coloured morning upward creep,
No more for my Rhodanthe would I weep,
But rest awhile with poppied lids, if ye,
O twittering swallows, would but let me be,
Nor dart below my eaves with maddening cheep !
O swallows, swallows, 'twas not I that clipped
The tender tongue of Philomela fair,
Not I ! Go shriek for Itylus elsewhere,
Before the feet of sleep have past me tripped !
Who knows? When I to dreamland shall have slipped,
The ghost of my dead love may meet me there !

THE LOVER AND THE WATERLILY

One weak willow
Just dips her pulseless fingers in the river ;
We for ever
Would make this slope of April grass our pillow ;
Where fishes flash and gleam,
We idly sit and dream,
While idler insects yet, with foot and wing,
Fret the still stream and sing.

Yellow blossom,
Come up to daylight from the deep dark water,
Faint, frail daughter,
Shot, perfumed, from thine unseen mother's bosom,

How looks the world to thee,
Whose new-born petals see
More wonders in the world of earth and sky
Than we can till we die?

Art thou lonely?
Shoots there no other blossom for thy pleasure?
No fair treasure
Of leaf and bloom for thee made, and thee only?
Shall pale decay and death
Obscure thy fragrant breath,
Ere love can win thy heart a little while
With one faint passing smile?

Ah! poor flower,
If this thing be so, then, though wise in seeming
Thy pure dreaming,
I would not change lives with thee for one hour,

Though, sage beyond a man,
Thy leaves have power to scan
The scheme of nature, and past wave and sod
Glance clearly up to God !

I, poor mortal,
As weak as thou, and blind where thou art seeing,
Whose frail being
Knocks, darkly groping, at life's outer portal,
Have yet one shining star
To cheer my heart afar ;—
'Tis Love, more sweet than Wisdom, more divine
Than any gift of thine.

This dear Woman,
Whose golden head beneath the long wan willow
Makes its pillow
Of this warm grass, so strangely soft and human,

Content to hold my hand,

Cares not to understand

Those mysteries that flowers and trees may know

A moment ere they go.

THE WHITETHROAT.

AN ESSAY IN CRITICISM.

I heard the Whitethroat sing
Last eve at twilight when the wind was dead,
And her sleek bosom and her fair smooth head
Vibrated, ruffling, and her olive wing
Trembled. So soft her song was that it seemed
As though, in wandering through the copse at noon,
She must have found the holy bough where dreamed
The day-struck Nightingale,
And, listening, must have overheard too soon
The dim rehearsal of that golden tale
That greets the laggard moon.

But through the imitative strain,
Between each gentle cadence, and again
When those clear notes she tried, for which her throat
Was not so capable as fain,
I joyed to hear her own peculiar note
Through all the music float.
But when the gentle song, that streamed away,
Like some enamoured rivulet that flows
Under a night of leaves and flowering may,
Died on the stress of its own lovely pain,
Even as it died away,
It seemed as if no influence could restrain
The notes from welling in the Whitethroat's brain ;
But with the last faint chords, on fluttering wing
She rose, until she hung in sunset air ;
A little way she rose, as if her care
Were all to reach the heavens, her radiant goal,
Then sank among the leaves.

Pathetic singer ! with no strength to sing,
And wasted pinions far too weak to bear
The body's weight that mars the singing soul,
In wild disorder, see, her bosom heaves !
Scarcely, with quivering plumes,
She wins the sparse bough of that tulip-tree,
Whose leaves unfinished ape her faulty song,
Whose mystic flowers her delicate minstrelsy.
But, hark ! how her rich throat resumes
Its broken music, and the garden blooms
Around her, and the flower that waited long,
The vast magnolia, rends its roseate husk,
And opens to the dusk ;
Odour and song embalm the day's decline.
Ah ! pulsing heart of mine,
Flattered beyond all judgment by delight,
This pleasing harmony, this gentle light,
This soft and enervating breeze of flowers,
This magic antechamber of the night

With florid tapestry of twilight hours,
Is this enough for thee?
Lo! from the summit of the tulip-tree
The enamoured Whitethroat answered 'Yes! O yes!'
And once again, with passion and the stress
Of thoughts too tender and too sad to be
Enshrined in any melody she knew,
She rose into the air;
And then, oppressed with pain too keen to bear,
Her last notes faded as she downward flew.

And she was silent. But the night came on;
A whisper rose among the giant trees,
Between their quivering topmost boughs there shone
The liquid depths of moonlight tinted air;
By slow degrees
The darkness crept upon me unaware.
The enchanted silence of the hours of dew
Fell like a mystic presence more and more,

Aweing the senses. Then I knew,
But scarcely heard, thrilled through to the brain's core,
The shrill first prelude of triumphant song,
Cleaving the twilight. Ah! we do thee wrong,
Unequalled Philomela, while thy voice
We hear not; every gentle song and clear
Seems worthy of thee to our poor noonday choice.
But when thy true fierce music, full of pain,
And wounded memory, and the tone austere
Of antique passion, fills our hearts again,
We marvel at our light and frivolous ear.
Ah! how they answer from the woodland glades!
How deep and rich the waves of music pour
On night's enchanted shore!
From star-lit alleys where the elm-tree shades
The hare's smooth leverets from the moon's distress
From pools all silvered o'er,
Where water-buds their petals upward press,

Vibrating with the song, and stir, and shed
Their inmost perfume o'er their shining bed,
Yea, from each copse I hear a bird,
As by a more than mortal woe undone,
Sing, as no other creature ever sang,
Since through the Phrygian forests Atys heard
His wild compeers come fluting one by one,
Till all the silent uplands rang and rang.

THE MÆNAD'S GRAVE.

The girl who once, on Lydian heights,
  Around the sacred grove of pines,
Would dance through whole tempestuous nights
  When no moon shines,
Whose pipe of lotos featly blown
Gave airs as shrill as Cotys' own,

Who, crowned with buds of ivy dark,
  Three times drained deep with amorous lips
The wine-fed bowl of willow-bark,
  With silver tips,
Nor sank, nor ceased, but shouted still
Like some wild wind from hill to hill,

She lies at last where poplars wave
  Their sad gray foliage all day long,
The river murmurs near her grave
  A soothing song ;
Farewell, it saith ! Her days have done
With shouting at the set of sun.

THE RETURN OF THE SWALLOWS.

'Out in the meadows the young grass springs,
Shivering with sap,' said the larks, 'and we
Shoot into air with our strong young wings,
Spirally up over level and lea;
Come, O Swallows, and fly with us
Now that horizons are luminous!
Evening and morning the world of light,
Spreading and kindling, is infinite!'

Far away, by the sea in the south,
The hills of olive and slopes of fern
Whiten and glow in the sun's long drouth,
Under the heavens that beam and burn;

And all the swallows were gathered there
Flitting about in the fragrant air,
And heard no sound from the larks, but flew
Flashing under the blinding blue.

Out of the depths of their soft rich throats
Languidly fluted the thrushes, and said :
'Musical thought in the mild air floats,
Spring is coming and winter is dead !
Come, O Swallows, and stir the air,
For the buds are all bursting unaware,
And the drooping eaves and the elm-trees long
To hear the sound of your low sweet song.'

Over the roofs of the white Algiers,
Flashingly shadowing the bright bazaar,
Flitted the swallows, and not one hears
The call of the thrushes from far, from far ;

Sighed the thrushes ; then, all at once,
Broke out singing the old sweet tones,
Singing the bridal of sap and shoot,
The tree's slow life between root and fruit.

But just when the dingles of April flowers
Shine with the earliest daffodils,
When, before sunrise, the cold clear hours
Gleam with a promise that noon fulfils,—
Deep in the leafage the cuckoo cried,
Perched on a spray by a rivulet-side,
Swallows, O Swallows, come back again
To swoop and herald the April rain.

And something awoke in the slumbering heart
Of the alien birds in their African air,
And they paused, and alighted, and twittered apart,
And met in the broad white dreamy square,

And the sad slave woman, who lifted up
From the fountain her broad-lipped earthen cup,
Said to herself, with a weary sigh,
'To-morrow the swallows will northward fly!'

THE AUTUMN OF THE WORLD.

The last wan petals leave the rose,
The latest swallows preen for flight,
The summer's gone where no one knows,
With dead men's love, and spent years' light,
And warm hearts buried out of sight.

Red roses are the crown of youth ;
The warm light falls on lovers' lips ;
Laugh, then, and fondle, happy mouth,
But yet, remember, sweet time slips,
Death hurries on with full eclipse !

So short, so sad! Oh! let not Death
Find only faded flowers and wine,
When, hungry for the joyous breath
That dreams not of the years' decline,
He lays his cold white mouth to thine!

Cling to the flying hours; and yet
Let one pure hope, one great desire,
Like song on dying lips, be set,
That ere we fall in scattered fire
Our hearts may lift the world's heart higher.

Here in the autumn months of Time,
Before the great new year can break,
Some little way our feet should climb,
Some little mark our words should make
For liberty and manhood's sake!

Clear brain and sympathetic heart,
A spirit on flame with love for Man,
Hands swift to labour, slow to part,—
If any good, since time began,
The soul can fashion, such souls can.

And so when we are dead and past,
The undying world will some day reach
Its glorious hour of dawn at last,
And we across time's sunken beach
May smile, one moment, each to each.

LIFE IN DEATH.

O sweet for dying hands to hold
The earliest jonquil pale ;
The breath is faint, the lips grow cold
As o'er the golden leaves they fold,
Their odour to inhale.

Sweet thus upon a flower to die,
And dream its whole life's dream,
Below the cold white roots to lie,
To feel the blossom shoot on high,
The slow sap gush and stream.

Its beauty comes from out of sight ;
Perchance the spirit goes
To win that self-same clime whose light
Can make these petals warm and bright
Before their buds unclose.

Through death it comes ; 'tis all we know,
Yet this should bring us gain,—
Since such delight from death can flow,
We need not shudder when we go
Where silence quiets pain.

Life hems us round on every side,
Like dim translucent stone ;
Its carven walls and floors divide
The eternal spaces deep and wide
From our aerial cone.

But every year when spring is new
And tender grass is green,
The heavy-scented flowers renew
The miracle of death shot through
By many a chink unseen.

Dumb messengers, whose only speech
Is their intense perfume,
Out of the infinite they reach
Some subtle mystery to teach
Of hope beyond the tomb.

Thus, when my mortal days are o'er,
May Death, no dreadful thing,
Break through the alabaster floor
And living spikenard on me pour
From yellow flowers in spring.

DESIDERIUM.

Sit there for ever, dear, and lean
  In marble as in fleeting flesh,
Above the tall grey reeds that screen
  The river when the breeze is fresh ;
For ever let the morning light
Stream down that forehead broad and white,
And round that cheek for my delight.

Already that flushed moment grows
  So dark, so distant ; through the ranks
Of scented reed the river flows
  Still murmuring to its willowy banks ;
But we can never hope to share
Again that rapture fond and rare,
Unless you turn immortal there.

There is no other way to hold
These webs of mingled joy and pain ;
Like gossamer their threads enfold
The journeying heart without a strain,—
Then break, and pass in cloud or dew,
And while the ecstatic soul goes through
Are withered in the parching blue.

Hold, Time, a little while thy glass,
And, youth, fold up those peacock wings !
More rapture fills the years that pass
Than any hope the future brings ;
Some for to-morrow rashly pray,
And some desire to hold to-day,
But I am sick for yesterday.

Since yesterday the hills were blue
That shall be gray for evermore,
And the fair sunset was shot through
With colour never seen before ;

Tyrannic love smiled yesterday,
And lost the terrors of his sway,
But is a god again to-day.

Ah ! who will give us back the past ?
Ah ! woe, that youth should love to be
Like this swift Thames that speeds so fast,
And is so fain to find the sea,—
That leaves this maze of shadow and sleep,
These creeks down which blown blossoms creep,
For breakers of the homeless deep.

Then sit for ever, dear, in stone,
As when you turned with half a smile,
And I will haunt this islet lone,
And with a dream my tears beguile ;
And in my reverie forget
That stars and suns were made to set,
That love grows old, or eyes are wet.

THE PIPE-PLAYER.

Cool, and palm-shaded from the torrid heat,
The young brown tenor puts his singing by,
And sets the twin pipe to his lips to try
Some air of bulrush-glooms where lovers meet ;
O swart musician, time and fame are fleet,
Brief all delight, and youth's feet fain to fly !
Pipe on in peace ! To-morrow must we die ?
What matter, if our life to-day be sweet !
Soon, soon, the silver paper-reeds that sigh
Along the Sacred River will repeat
The echo of the dark-stoled bearers' feet,
Who carry you, with wailing, where must lie
Your swathed and withered body, by and by,
In perfumed darkness with the grains of wheat.

VERDLEIGH COPPICE.

Oh the perfumes and the shadows of the pines in Verdleigh Coppice,
Straight red boles that catch the sunset as it smoulders in the west!
Creamy glint of waving barley, and a scarlet flash of poppies,
Seen through columns where the evening wind is moaning to its rest.

Here it seems the scent is deepest where the wind has caught the branches,
And a loaded bough lies broken, and the sap has oozed to light,

With its golden gums of healing, like the chastened love
that staunches
With the morning's consolation some deep sorrow of the
night.

With the piny odour streaming on the wind into my
senses,
I grow flushed with subtle pleasure as an Eastern king
may do
When the odalisque that loves him from her twinkling
fan dispenses
An unceasing breeze of sandal-wood that stirs the
chamber through.

And my heart is still from fretting, and my pulse's weary
fever
Settles slowly down to cool and calm vibration of the
blood ;

I could rest upon the greenness of this mossy couch for ever,
And become a silent portion of the silence of the wood.

I should feel the sap in spring-tide as a part of my existence,
And the pure sweet life of blossoms would repeat itself in me,
Till the old world's course of passion, with its wearisome insistence,
Should fade back and be forgotten in this milder ecstasy.

Surely all things here are quiet, and this still domain of nature
Tastes in little all the sweetness of the vanished golden age ;

Love enthroned among these pine-trees smiles on every
sylvan creature,
And the pastorals they fashion on this stainless rustic
stage.

But among the elms that cluster round the stately Hall
up yonder,
Where the ladies praise the prospect from the terrace at
their feet,
Like a caged thing sick in exile with a smiling face I
wander,
And with viewless wings the barrier, be it golden, still I
beat!

For the idle jesting frets me, and my heart in its de-
jection
Smiles like Timon with the laughter of a spirit out of
tune,

At the courtly face-politeness and the cordial mock-affection,
And the unknown lightless facet of each white revolving moon.

As the shadows of this pine-copse to a ring of foolish faces,
As this perfume of the woodland to a faded waft of musk,
So my heart that leaps with pleasure in all hushed sequestered places,
To the self-same heart that battles in this world of claw and tusk.

Ah! warm pines of Verdleigh Coppice, I must hold to you for ever,
Build my home in you, like Thoreau, be your creature and your child,

Till no vestige of the worldling rest upon my soul to sever
My enfranchised heart and body from all gentle things and wild.

Here be sure no savage discords break the joyous diapason
Of the vast and secret music of all vocal things and mute,
Love the sweet birds' only clarion, love the blossoms' only blazon,
Love the animating purpose in each kindling vein and shoot.

Hush! the cruel stoat that rustles in the tangle of the brambles,
Sleek, with snow-white fangs that languish for the rabbit's drip of blood ;—

Hush ! the jay with laugh discordant as far up the tree
he scrambles
With a hungry beak to slaughter the soft younglings of
the wood.

Hush ! an orange bee floats by me, like a summer wind
incarnate,
But a red flash swoops athwart it and behold it upward
borne !
'Twas the bright crest of the wood-chat, like the sunlight
in a garnet,
And the writhing bee hangs wretchedly impaled upon a
thorn.

See this mastering mass of ivy with an ash-tree bound
within it,
Like a wrestler foiled and strangled, lo ! the friendly
ash is dead ;

And the ivy bears half-hidden the forlorn nest of a linnet,
But the rain has drowned the nurselings, and the parent-birds have fled.

Even here, in Verdleigh Coppice, there can be such desolation,
Such forgetfulness untender, such a cruel greed and rage,
Underneath the summer odours nation warring against nation,
And the gentlest creatures winning bitter pain for heritage.

Not in homes of mankind only, are there silent webs for passion,
And a smiling garb for sorrow, and a sunny veil for grief

Nature works out her intention in the same unholy fashion
As her aping firstborn Man does through his foolish day and brief.

Then farewell, sweet Verdleigh Coppice, since I find for all the beauty
Of thine allies hushed and sombre, of thy glimpses of the wheat,
Here as elsewhere love resides not, and red rapine is a duty,
Thou shalt hardly win long sojourn from my restless, homeless feet.

And I learn 'tis best in all things to hold living very lightly,
Taste the perfumes of the fir-wood, but not linger there too long,

Lest the mazes of the forest lead to foulnesses unsightly,

And a haunting horror clash upon the night-bird's liquid song.

THE PRAISE OF DIONYSUS.

CHANT ROYAL.

Behold, above the mountains there is light,
A streak of gold, a line of gathering fire,
And the dim East hath suddenly grown bright
With pale aerial flame, that drives up higher
The lurid mists that of the night aware
Breasted the dark ravines and coverts bare ;
Behold, behold ! the granite gates unclose,
And down the vales a lyric people flows,
Who dance to music, and in dancing fling
Their frantic robes to every wind that blows,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

Nearer they press, and nearer still in sight,
Still dancing blithely in a seemly choir ;
Tossing on high the symbol of their rite.
The cone-tipped thyrsus of a god's desire ;
Nearer they come, tall damsels flushed and fair,
With ivy circling their abundant hair,
Onward, with even pace, in stately rows,
With eye that flashes, and with cheek that glows,
And all the while their tribute-songs they bring,
And newer glories of the past disclose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

The pure luxuriance of their limbs is white,
And flashes clearer as they draw the nigher,
Bathed in an air of infinite delight,
Smooth without wound of thorn or fleck of mire,
Borne up by song as by a trumpet's blare,
Leading the van to conquest, on they fare ;
Fearless and bold, whoever comes or goes,

These shining cohorts of Bacchantes close,
Shouting and shouting till the mountains ring,
And forests grim forget their ancient woes,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

And youths are there for whom full many a night
Brought dreams of bliss, vague dreams that haunt and tire,
Who rose in their own ecstasy bedight,
And wandered forth through many a scourging briar,
And waited shivering in the icy air,
And wrapped the leopard-skin about them there,
Knowing, for all the bitter air that froze,
The time must come, that every poet knows,
When he shall rise and feel himself a king,
And follow, follow where the ivy grows,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

But oh! within the heart of this great flight,
Whose ivory arms hold up the golden lyre?

What form is this of more than mortal height?
What matchless beauty, what inspirèd ire!
The brindled panthers know the prize they bear,
And harmonise their steps with stately care;
Bent to the morning, like a living rose,
The immortal splendour of his face he shows,
And where he glances, leaf and flower and wing
Tremble with rapture, stirred in their repose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

ENVOI.

Prince of the flute and ivy, all thy foes
Record the bounty that thy grace bestows,
But we, thy servants, to thy glory cling,
And with no frigid lips our songs compose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

THE PRAISE OF ARTEMIS.

By Cephissus'
Silver stream,
White narcissus
Blossoms gleam,
And the chilly
Waterlily
Opens stilly
Cups of cream.

The soft night
Scarce forgets
Scent of white
Violets,

Ere there blows
Rose on rose,
And their snows
The wind frets.

Through the shadows
And perfume,
By the meadows
Deep in bloom,
Who comes singing
Blithe, and bringing
Light upspringing
Through the gloom?

At her feet
Breaks the dawn,
Fond and fleet
As a fawn

Up the skies
See! it flies,
And night dies
On the lawn.

By her fingers
Hangs a bow,
While there lingers
Round her so
A god's glory
Dim and hoary,
Wreathed in story
Long ago.

Round her mild
Brows and fair
Clings a wild
Huntress air,

At her side,
Girdled, hide
Arrows tried,
And a spear.

And the leopard
Fears her skill,
But the shepherd
On the hill
Never misses
Warm love-blisses,
Whispers, kisses
All his fill.

He alone
Hears her breast
Pant and moan
In unrest,

None else knows
How these snows
Flush with rose,
Love-opprest.

She can follow,
Fierce, elate,
White Apollo
Grim and great;
Shrilly sang her
Shafts' wild clangour,
When his anger
Flashed in fate.

When the morn
Wept to see,
Through the corn,
Niobe

Cold and slain,
And the twain
Turned again
Haughtily.

Like a lion
Shot and shent,
Falls Orion,
Hellward sent;
Nymph and satyr
Part and scatter,
Trembling at her
Pure intent.

For she brooks not
Mortal pride,
And she looks not
Near or wide,

Heeds no praying,
Makes no staying,
Hastes the slaying,
Once defied.

Then with humble
Looks and dread,
Let us crumble
Holy bread,
Feed the flying
Birds undying,
Wheeling, crying,
Round our head.

With elation
Half divine,
Pour libation,
Oil and wine ;

While it blazes,
Chaunt her praises,
Crowned with daisies,
  Wreathed with pine.

And narcissus
  Blossoming,
From Cephissus
  Duly bring,
At her altar
Praise, exalt her,
Never falter,
  Ever sing.

EUTHANASIA.

When age comes by and lays his frosty hands
So lightly on mine eyes, that, scarce aware
Of what an endless weight of gloom they bear,
I pause, unstirred, and wait for his commands ;
When time has bound these limbs of mine with bands,
And hushed mine ears, and silvered all my hair,
May sorrow come not, nor a vain despair
Trouble my soul that meekly girded stands.

As silent rivers into silent lakes,
Through hush of reeds that not a murmur breaks,
Wind, mindful of the poppies whence they came,
So may my life, and calmly burn away,
As ceases in a lamp at break of day
The fragrant remnant of memorial flame.

GREECE AND ENGLAND.

Would this sunshine be completer,
Or these violets smell sweeter,
Or the birds sing more in metre,
If it all were years ago,
When the melted mountain-snow
Heard in Enna all the woe
Of the poor forlorn Demeter?

Would a stronger life pulse o'er us
If a panther-chariot bore us,
If we saw, enthroned before us,
Ride the leopard-footed god,
With a fir-cone tip the rod,
Whirl the thyrsus round, and nod
To a drunken Mænad-chorus?

Bloomed there richer, redder roses
Where the Lesbian earth encloses
All of Sappho? where reposes
Meleager, laid to sleep
By the olive-girdled deep;
Where the Syrian maidens weep,
Bringing serpolet in posies?

Ah! it may be! Greece had leisure
For a world of faded pleasure;
We must tread a tamer measure,
To a milder homelier lyre;
We must tend a paler fire,
Lay less perfume on the pyre,
Be content with poorer treasure!

Were the brown-limbed lovers bolder?
Venus younger, Cupid older?
Down the wood-nymph's warm white shoulder

Trailed a purpler, madder vine?
Were the poets more divine?
Brew we no such golden wine
Here, where summer suns are colder?

Yet for us too life has flowers,
Time a glass of joyous hours,
Interchange of sun and showers,
And a wealth of leafy glades,
Meant for loving men and maids,
Full of warm green lights and shades,
Trellis-work of wild-wood bowers.

So while English suns are keeping
Count of sowing-time and reaping,
We've no need to waste our weeping,
Though the glad Greeks lounged at ease
Underneath their olive-trees,
And the Sophoclean bees
Swarmed on lips of poets sleeping!

THE FIRST SNOW.

The first sharp snow is shrilling through the trees,
Muffling all other sounds, as though it were
The cold hand of a god pressed unaware
Across the strings of all earth's harmonies,
Or as a sorrow with its silences
Drowns a heart's music in one chord of care,
Filling with dumbness of unechoing air
What rang with rapture of a soul at ease.
Yet fair the widowed world that sits in white,
And sweet to ears attuned that whistling sound
Of falling frost, so pure, so keen, so light!
Sometimes, aweary of gay bird and leaf,
This also good the satiate heart hath found,—
To hear the sharp still monotone of grief.

THE SUICIDE.

Cold glassy pool in whose dark fount
The sad shy Oreads bathed by night
Their marble limbs and white,
Why stir the elms that round thee mount,
Quivering in strange affright?

Ah, woe! for hither Nicias came,
And underneath the cool sweet boughs
Forgetful of his vows,
Soul-stricken by love's fatal flame
That marked his ashen brows,

He whispered, 'Rhodion! Rhodion!' twice,
And bent above thy shivering wave,
That no faint echo gave;
One piercing blow could well suffice,
And then, no god could save.

His blood dripped slowly down to thee,
And as it touched thy virgin face,
And soiled its crystal grace,
The moving elm-trees moaned to see
Their holy fount's disgrace.

And now no more from dusk to dawn
The Oreads bathe their slender feet
Through nights of dog-star heat,
Nor press thy banks of shelving lawn
With shapely limbs and fleet;

Nor shall, till she who wrought his woe,
And with the shafts of her disdain
Pursued his fading brain,
Come here in grief, and, bending low,
Purge thee with tears again.

THE BURDEN OF DELIGHT.

Remember how the winter through,
While all the ways were choked with mire,
Half-maddened with the rain, we two
Have nestled closer round the fire;
And talked of all that should be done
When April brought us back the sun,
What gardens white with butterflies,
What soft green nooks of budded heather,
What moorlands open to the skies
We two would scour together!

And now the month comes round again!
  Cool interchange of genial hours,
Soft gleams of sunlight, streams of rain,
  Have starred the meadow-lands with flowers,
And in the orchards on the hills
The grass is gold with daffodils,
And we have wandered hand in hand,
  Where sea below and sky above
Seem narrowing to a strip of land
    The pathway that we love.

Our path looks out on the wide sea
  And knows not of the land; we sit
For hours in silent reverie
  To watch the sea and pulse with it;
Its deep monotonous refrain
Brings melancholy, almost pain;

We scarcely wish to speak or move,
But just to feel each other there,
And sense of presence is like love,
And silence more than prayer.

Sharp round the steep hill's utmost line
It winds, and, just below, the grass
Sinks with tumultuous incline
To where the rock-pools shine like glass ;
The tufts of thrift can drink their fill
Of sea-wind on this rugged hill,
And all the herbage, tossed and blown,
Is stained with salt and crushed with wind,
Save where, behind some boulder stone,
A harbour flowers may find.

The bright sea sparkles, sunbeam-kissed,
And o'er its face such breezes float

As lightly turn to amethyst
  The pearl-gray of a ring-dove's throat ;
Thus stirred and ruffled, shines anew
The radiant plain of changing hue,
So gentle that the eye divines
  No reason why the foam should fall
So loudly, in such serried lines,
    Against the dark rock-wall.

The wind is low now ; even here
  Where all the breezes congregate,
The softest warbler need not fear
  To linger with its downy mate ;
And here where you have longed to be,
So many weeks and months, with me,
Sit silently or softly speak
  Or sing some air of pensive mood,
Not loud enough to mar or break
    This delicate solitude.

Are we not happy? Sunlit air,
Soft colour, floods of dewy light,
A flowery perfume everywhere,
Pour out their wealth for our delight ;
Through dreary hours of snow and sleet,
The hope of these winged winter's feet,
We have them now ; the very breath
Of nature seems an altar-fire
That wakes the bright world's heart from death
To satiate our desire.

Sing to me, therefore, sing or speak !
Wake my dull heart to happiness,
Perchance my pulses are too weak
To stir with all this sweet excess ;
Perhaps the sudden spring has come
Too soon, and found my spirit dumb ;
Howe'er it be, my heart is cold,
No echo stirs within my brain,

To me, too suddenly grown old,
This beauty speaks in vain.

Why are you silent? Lo! to-day
It is not as it once hath been;
I cannot sit the old sweet way,
Absorbed, contented and serene;
I cannot feel my heart rejoice,
I crave the comfort of your voice;
Speak! speak, remind me of the past,
Let my spent embers at your fire
Revive and kindle, till at last
Delight surpass desire.

Still are you silent, only press
My hand, and turn your face away?
You wince, too, from the fierce caress
That April flings on us to-day?

O human heart, too weak to bear
The whole fulfilment of a prayer !
This sudden summer strikes us dumb,
  The wild hope realised but scares,
The substances of dreams become
    A burden unawares.

How can we sit here and not thrill
  With but the pleasure of past time?
This pathway winding round the hill
  Should stir us like enchanted rhyme !
Nay ! for the dull and sluggish brain
Is spurred to action all in vain !
And when the spirit cannot rise
  Through natural feeling into light,
No perfumed air, no splendid skies
    Can lend it wings for flight.

Come then and leave the glittering sea
To sparkle in the laughing air,
Another day its face will be
No less refulgent, no less fair,
And we by custom be made strong
To bear what we desired so long ;
To-day the slackening nerves demand
A milder light, a sadder air,
Some corner of forgotten land
Still winter-like and bare.

Come, leave our foot-path for to-day,
And, turning inland, seek the woods
Where last year's sombre leaves decay
In brown sonorous solitudes ;
The murmurous voice of those dark trees
Shall teach us more than sun or seas,

And in that twilight we may find
Some golden flower of strange perfume,
A blossom hidden from the wind,
A flame within the tomb.

FEBRUARY IN ROME.

When Roman fields are red with cyclamen,
And in the palace-gardens you may find,
Under great leaves and sheltering briony-bind,
Clusters of cream-white violets, O then
The ruined city of immortal men
Must smile, a little to her fate resigned ;
And through her corridors the slow warm wind
Gush harmonies beyond a mortal ken.
Such soft favonian airs upon a flute,
Such shadowy censers burning live perfume,
Shall lead the mystic city to her tomb ;
Nor flowerless springs, nor autumns without fruit,
Nor summer-mornings when the winds are mute,
Trouble her soul till Rome be no more Rome.

THE GOLDEN ISLES.

Sad would the salt waves be,
And cold the singing sea,
And dark the gulfs that echo to the seven-stringed lyre,
If things were what they seem,
If life had no fair dream,
No mirage made to tip the dull sea-line with fire.

Then Sleep would have no light,
And Death no voice or sight,
Their sister Sorrow, too, would be as blind as they,
And in this world of doubt
Our souls would roam about,
And find no song to sing and no word good to say.'

Or else, in cloud and gloom
The soul would read her doom,
And sing a rune obscure above a murky sea,
Dark phrases that would wrong
The crystal fount of song,
For limpid as a pearl the poet's thought should be.

Not in the storm and rain,
Not pale with grief and pain,
But red with sunlit pulse and breathing health and hope,
The bard in garments gay
Should tread the sacred way
That leads him towards his god high up the laurelled slope.

But on the shores of time,
Hearkening the breakers' chime
Falling by night and day along our human sand,
The poet sits and sees,
Borne on the morning breeze,
The phantom islands float a furlong from the land.

The reverend forms they bear
Of islands famed and fair,
On whose keen rocks, of old, heroic fleets have struck,
Whose marble dells have seen
In garments pale and green
The nymphs and gods go by to bring the shepherds luck.

White are their crags, and blue
Ravines divide them through,
And like a violet shell their cliffs recede from shore ;
Between their fretted capes
Fresh isles in lovely shapes
Die on the horizon pale, and lapse in liquid light.

Past that dim straitened shore,
The Argive mother bore
The boy she brought to Zeus, pledge of the golden fee ;
Here Delos, like a gem,
Still feels Latona's hem,
A lordlier Naxos crowns a purpler arc of sea.

There mines of Parian lie
Hid from the sun's clear eye,
And waiting still the lamp, the hammer, and the axe
And he who, pensive, sees
These nobler Cyclades
Forgets the ills of life, and nothing mortal lacks.

But many an one, in vain,
Puts out across the main,
And thinks to leap on land and tread that magic shore ;
He comes, for all his toil,
No nearer to their soil,
The isles are floating on, a furlong still before.

So he contends, until
The storm wind, harsh and chill, [flame,
Beats on his sail, and blots the heaven with cloud and
And well indeed he fares,
After a world of cares,
Returning, if he reach the harbour whence he came.

The poet sits and smiles,
He knows the golden isles,
He never hopes to win their cliffs, their marble mines,
Reefs where their green sea raves,
The coldness of their caves,
Their felspars full of light, their rosy corallines.

All these he oft has sought,
Led by his travelling thought,
Their glorious distance hides no inward charm from him ;
He would not have their day
To common light decay,
He loves their mystery best, and bids their shapes be dim.

They solace all his pains,
They animate his strains,
Within their radiant glow he soon forgets the world ;
They bathe his torrid noons
In the soft light of moons,
They leave his lingering evenings tenderly empearled.

As one who walks all day
Along a dusty way,
May turn aside to plunge in some sequestered pool,
And so may straight forget
His weariness and fret,
So seeks the poet's heart those islands blue and cool.

Content to know them there,
Hung in the shining air,
He trims no foolish sail to win the hopeless coast,
His vision is enough
To feed his soul with love,
And he who grasps too much may even himself be lost.

He knows that, if he waits,
One day the well-worn gates
Of life will ope and send him westward o'er the wave ;
Then will he reach ere night
The isles of his delight,
But they must float until they anchor in the grave.

LEAVE-TAKING.

Make haste to go lest I should bid thee stay,
Yet leave thy lingering hand in mine, and turn
Those dark pathetic eyes of thine away,
Lest when I see the passion in them burn,
My heart may faint, and through the broken door
Love enter to pass out again no more.

Yet tremble not, sweet veinèd hand and soft,
And press not mine with such a cold farewell,
Lest I remember, now too late, how oft
My heart has moved thee with its ebb and swell,
Lest I should take those fingers frail and white,
And kiss them warm in mine own will's despite.

Farewell ! farewell ! ah ! had we only known
How hard it is to rend one life in twain,
We might have wandered through the world alone,
And never felt so sharp a thrill of pain ;
Go hence in silence, or thy last reply
Will haunt my weary memory till I die.

SONG.

There's a sleek thrush sits in the apple-tree
When it blooms all over with rosy snow,
And hark ! how he opens his heart to me,
Till its inmost hopes and desires I know !
Blow, wind, blow,
For the thrush will fly when the bloom must go.

O a friend I had, and I loved him well,
And his heart was open and sang to mine,
And it pains me more than I choose to tell,
That he cares no more if I laugh or pine.
Friend of mine,
Can the music fade out of love like thine !

WORSHIP.

You are like an apple-shoot
In the orchard-closes,
And I a flower, whose tender root
On your root reposes;
The cold white winter through
We waited, I and you,
Till sunlit winds shot through
The thickets of dead roses.

'Is this barren bough alive?'—
Said they;—but we waited.
'Can this shrivelled stem revive?'—
Spring is scarce belated!

Your buds break out apace,
And all this quiet place
Shines with the soft green grace
Of warm leaves renovated.

I, the poorest, was the first !
How doth love embolden !
From my sheaf of leaves outburst
Three cups, green and golden ;
One day at dawn they came
Shot out like sudden flame ;
They whisper now your name,
And tremble, unbeholden.

Will they not stand shamed and dumb
When you burst in flower !
March is going, April come
Rich in sun and shower ;

I am a daffodil;
Sweet, let your heart be still,
I wait for you until
You reach your blossoming hour.

WINTER-GREEN.

To-day the winter woods are wet,
And chill with airs that miss the sun ;
The autumn of the year is done,
Its leaves all fallen, its flower-stars set,
Its frosty hours begun.

Should last year's gold narcissus yearn
For next year's roses, oh ! how vain !
No brief dead flowers arise again,
But each sweet little life in turn
Must shoot and bloom and wane.

Sweet, had the years that slip so fast
Brought you too soon, or me too late,
How had we gnashed our teeth at fate,
And wandered down to death at last,
Forlorn, disconsolate!

Surely before the stars were sure,
Before the moon was set in heaven,
Your unborn soul to mine was given,
Your clear white spirit, rare and pure,
For me was formed and shriven.

Ah! surely no time ever was
When we were not; and our soul's light
Made those cold spaces infinite
That lie between the years like glass,
Seen only in God's sight!

Howe'er it be, my one desire,
If chance has brought us face to face,
Or if the scheme of things found place
To store our twin hearts' light and fire
In strange foreseeing grace,—

Howe'er it be, for us at least,
The woodland-pathways are not dark,
New lights are on the boughs and bark,
And in the sunless rainshot east,
We hear a mounting lark !

THE TOMB OF SOPHOCLES.

A bounding satyr, golden in the beard,
That leaps with goat-feet high into the air,
And crushes from the thyme an odour rare,
Keeps watch around the marble tomb revered
Of Sophocles, the poet loved and feared,
Whose mighty voice once called out of her lair
The Dorian muse severe, with braided hair,
Who loved the thyrsus and wild dances weird.
Here all day long the pious bees can pour
Libations of their honey ; round this tomb
The Dionysiac ivy loves to roam ;
The satyr laughs ; but He awakes no more,
Wrapped up in silence at the grave's cold core,
Nor sees the sun wheel round in the white dome.

THE PALINODE.

As Lucius through his asses eyes
  Stared downward from the shameful stage,
And heard the ribald laughter rise,

And yearned out towards his heritage
  Of manly thought and manly guise,
And, rending in blind brutish rage

The garland-bands that bound his head,
  Champed, all unthinking, the rich rose,
And straightway knew the beast was dead,

And the man living, while the throes
Of life returned, and the past fled
And left him naked ; so now glows

New power and passion through my veins.
I have walked too long in mist and mire ;
I know by heart the pastoral plains,

The call has reached me to go higher,
A riper air my soul sustains,
And I can breathe through frost and fire.

A beetle was my rose. I lay,
My window open to the night,
And listened to the swing and sway

Of branches balanced in the light
And aimless breezes. Wafts of hay
Came, faint with odour exquisite ;

The nightingale had sung so loud,
Her song had wakened a wild roe,
Deep in the fern as in a cloud ;

I heard him trotting far below,
And now inaudible. A crowd
Of nightingales were fluting low

In answer to their mate, and all
Passed deeper into the dim wood ;
I scarcely heard their call on call,

And felt alone with solitude :
Then came a whirr, a hush, a fall!
Some small intruder, bluff and rude,

Had sat him on my chamber floor ;
I sought and found him, with his wings
Half open ; never rode before

A warrior bent on starry things
So dainty in the mail he wore,
So rich in gorgeous blazonings ;

The chrysoprase with blow on blow
Had on some magic anvil lain
To fit his sturdy shoulders so,

The beryl that will bear no stain
Shone on his breastplate, and below
His buckler flashed with golden grain.

I took this knight of fair romaunt
Within the hollow of my hand ;
He had forgotten aim and vaunt.

Dead as a waif on some bare strand,
He lay, unheeding scoff and taunt,
And could or would not understand

That he was free as air to fly
And reach the stars, if such his will;
'Ah! foolish man-at-arms,' said I,

'So soon hast thou, too, drunk thy fill
Of high ambition, fain to lie,
A beetle then, a beetle still,

'When just five minutes gone thou wast
No beetle, but a spirit keen,
Borne up on aspirations vast

'As men's or angels', scarcely seen
In splendid soaring; all is past,
And thou art impotent and mean!

'Poor insect! yet not half so frail,
Nor so disaster-struck by far,
As men who set themselves to scale

'The heavens, and leap from star to star,
And, ere they seek to conquer, fail,
And learn at once what worms they are!'

Thus I,—and would have soon cast out
The stricken beetle; but he stirred,
And waved his gleaming horns about,

And saw the moon, and rose, and whirred
His gauzy wings in gorgeous flight,
Aud upwards faded, like a bird,

Far out into the night. I stared,
And, at the wonder of the thing,
My spirit suddenly stood bared,

Of all the petty swathes that cling
About the coward soul. It fared
With me as with that fabled king

Who woke to find the robes he wore
Mere nakedness. The beetle, numb,
Thrown helmless on an alien shore,

Afflicted, beaten, puzzled, dumb,
Balked in the blind desire to soar,
And whelmed with sorrows in a sum,

Could gather up his shattered skill,
And by an instinct most divine,
Steer for the stars again, and fill

His soul with music, while I pine
And mourn in discords weak and shrill
The failure of these hopes of mine.

A healthier courage aid me now
To cast this body of fears aside;
To stand with stedfast eye and brow

Under the fleckless heaven, decide
  At once, not heeding when or how,
My spirit among the stars to guide !

It shall be so ! Even now I feel
  The sordid cares that mar our day,
Pale wounds that leechcraft cannot heal,

Are staunched and vanish ; the vain fray
  Of earthly aims no more can steal
My resolute desire away ;

The brief success of smiling fools,
  The grace and fame of blander knaves,
Distress me not. They are the tools

Of some strange Delphic fate that craves,
  While human life it overrules,
The suffrage of poltroons and slaves.

The future is not left to these,
But when this giddy age is o'er,
And we look back from over-seas

Towards that forsaken fading shore
We call the Past, by slow degrees
High lights and peaks not seen before

Will rise into the liberal air,
And all that once was true and wise
And mocked-at, and all spirits that were

Content with unabated eyes
To seek the best with little care
For present fame, will take the guise

That immortality puts on.
Be this my goal ! and let me seek
The light that on my cradle shone ;

The least of us is not too weak
To leave the world with something done.
Master, I follow ! Master, speak !

THE ACONITE.

An evil gift, this flower of aconite,
Born in some drear tempestuous night of March,
When the shrill winds blow from the East, and parch
The horror-stricken earth in their wild flight ;
In some dull wood, against the edge of light,
Under the tassels of a wintry larch,
It rose, and gazing on the purple arch
Of moonless heaven, grew lurid at the sight.
Lo ! the one hateful thing that from her lap
Lets fall the loose-haired maiden, laughing Spring ;
Nay, rather let us deem this baleful thing
No springtide gift, gushing with generous sap,
But Winter's latest insult, by good hap
The last the foul anatomy can fling.

TO MY DAUGHTER.

Thou hast the colours of the Spring,
The gold of kingcups triumphing,
The blue of wood-bells wild ;
But winter-thoughts thy spirit fill,
And thou art wandering from us still,
Too young to be our child.

Yet have thy fleeting smiles confessed,
Thou dear and much-desirèd guest,
That home is near at last ;
Long lost in high mysterious lands,
Close by our door thy spirit stands,
Its journey well-nigh past.

Oh sweet bewildered soul, I watch
The fountains of thine eyes, to catch
New fancies bubbling there,
To feel our common light, and lose
The flush of strange ethereal hues
Too dim for us to share !

Fade, cold immortal lights, and make
This creature human for my sake,
Since I am nought but clay ;
An angel is too fine a thing
To sit beside my chair and sing,
And cheer my passing day.

I smile, who could not smile, unless
The air of rapt unconsciousness
Passed, with the fading hours ;
I joy in every childish sign
That proves the stranger less divine
And much more meekly ours.

I smile, as one by night who sees,
Through mist of newly-budded trees,
The clear Orion set,
And knows that soon the dawn will fly
In fire across the riven sky,
And gild the woodlands wet.

ALCYONE.

SONNET.

PHŒBUS.

What voice is this that wails above the deep?

ALCYONE.

A wife's, that mourns her fate and loveless days.

PHŒBUS.

What love lies buried in these water-ways?

ALCYONE.

A husband's, hurried to eternal sleep.

PHŒBUS.

Cease, O beloved, cease to wail and weep !

ALCYONE.

Wherefore ?

PHŒBUS.

The waters in a fiery blaze
Proclaim the godhead of my healing rays.

ALCYONE.

No god can sow where fate hath stood to reap.

PHŒBUS.

Hold, wringing hands ! cease, piteous tears, to fall !

ALCYONE.

But grief must rain and glut the passionate sea.

PHŒBUS.

Thou shalt forget this ocean and thy wrong,
And I will bless the dead, though past recall.

ALCYONE.

What canst thou give to me or him in me?

PHŒBUS.

A name in story and a light in song.

THE HOUSELEEK.

Green houseleek, whose fair lady-love
Is my white dove,
Peer down from our slant tilèd roof and see
If in my garden any flower or tree
Grows but for me !

Else will I scatter yellow peas,
And at my ease
Will woo thy soft companion to my feet,
And in the darkness of my safe retreat
Feel her heart beat ;

And shut her in a golden cage,
And mock thy rage,
Till thy red spikes of blossom day by day
Beneath the winds and autumn suns decay,
And fade away.

Round houseleek, squat upon the tiles,
For miles and miles
Thou canst gaze far and wide ; look down for me
And tell me what thy cunning leaf can see,
Harsh though it be.

The roses only live for pride ;
The lilies died
Because the rough moth troubled their pure bells ;
Deep down within the columbine's blue cells
Some sadness dwells.

The jonquils only breathe for God ;
A footstep trod
The hopeful-hearted pansy down to death ;
The honeysuckle overlavisheth
Her rich and luscious breath.

Only the violet I trust :
Surely she must,
Being so sweet, so modest and so free,
And knowing how I love her utterly,
Be true to me?

O tell me, houseleek, thou must know,
Say, is it so?
Then may thy dove's pink feet upon the eaves
Perch all day long beside thy patient leaves,
While her throat grieves.

THE SUPPLIANT.

Beneath the poplars o'er the sacred pool
The halcyons dart like rays of azure light,—
Fair presage! by the columns white and cool,
I'll watch till fall of night.

Perchance the goddess at the twilight's breath
Will come with silver feet and braidless hair,
And all too startled to decree my death,
Will hearken to my prayer.

So when at moon-rise by the farm I go,
The lovely girl who near the fig-tree stands,
May turn no more on scornful feet and slow,
But hold out both her hands.

THE WELL.

Like this cold and mossy fount
Which forgets the sun at noon,
Sees just stars enough to count,
And a vision of the moon,—

Where the little stems and leaves,
Round the edges of the well,
Quiver, while the water grieves,
At the tale it has to tell,—

Where your bright face, peering through
Two soft clouds of falling hair,
Sees a dim and troubled view
Of its own clear beauty there,—

Such my heart is ; in it lies
Your dear image all day long,
But 'tis stirred with fears and sighs,
And its dimness does you wrong.

DIZAIN.

Artist in verse, to whom the world appears
Most real, and yet the mirrored form of truth,
From whom alone the wasteful lapse of years
Robs nothing of earth's beauty or her youth,
Be grave, but joyous, with no taint of ruth,
For thou canst make an April shower of tears
Immortal, and so lull the aching ears
Of grief, that she shall laugh in time to come,
When her own melancholy voice she hears
Grown sweet on lips that never can be dumb.

VILLANELLES.

I

Wouldst thou not be content to die
  When low-hung fruit is hardly clinging,
And golden Autumn passes by?

Beneath this delicate rose-gray sky,
  While sunset bells are faintly ringing,
Wouldst thou not be content to die?

For wintry webs of mist on high
  Out of the muffled earth are springing,
And golden Autumn passes by.

*

O now when pleasures fade and fly,
And Hope her southward flight is winging,
Wouldst thou not be content to die?

Lest Winter come, with wailing cry
His cruel icy bondage bringing,
When golden Autumn hath passed by.

And thou, with many a tear and sigh,
While life her wasted hands is wringing,
Shalt pray in vain for leave to die
When golden Autumn hath passed by.

II.

Little mistress mine, good-bye!
I have been your sparrow true;
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Waste no tear and heave no sigh ;
  Life should still be blithe for you,
Little mistress mine, good-bye !

In your garden let me lie,
  Underneath the pointed yew
Dig my grave, for I must die.

We have loved the quiet sky
  With its tender arch of blue ;
Little mistress mine, good-bye !

That I still may feel you nigh,
  In your virgin bosom, too,
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Let our garden-friends that fly
  Be the mourners, fit and few.
Little mistress mine, good-bye !
Dig my grave, for I must die.

SESTINA.

TO F. H.

'Fra tutti il primo Arnaldo Daniello
Gran maestro d' amor.'—*Petrarch.*

In fair Provence, the land of lute and rose,
Arnaut, great master of the lore of love,
First wrought sestines to win his lady's heart;
For she was deaf when simpler staves he sang,
And for her sake he broke the bonds of rhyme,
And in this subtler measure hid his woe.

'Harsh be my lines,' cried Arnaut, 'harsh the woe
My lady, that enthorn'd and cruel rose,
Inflicts on him that made her live in rhyme!'

But through the metre spake the voice of Love,
And like a wild-wood nightingale he sang
Who thought in crabbed lays to ease his heart.

It is not told if her untoward heart
Was melted by her poet's lyric woe,
Or if in vain so amorously he sang ;
Perchance through cloud of dark conceits he rose
To nobler heights of philosophic song,
And crowned his later years with sterner rhyme.

This thing alone we know : the triple rhyme
Of him who bared his vast and passionate heart
To all the crossing flames of hate and love,
Wears in the midst of all its storm of woe,—
As some loud morn of March may bear a rose,—
The impress of a song that Arnaut sang.

'Smith of his mother-tongue,' the Frenchman sang
Of Lancelot and of Galahad, the rhyme

That beat so bloodlike at its core of rose,
It stirred the sweet Francesca's gentle heart
To take that kiss that brought her so much woe
And sealed in fire her martyrdom of love.

And Dante, full of her immortal love,
Stayed his drear song, and softly, fondly sang
As though his voice broke with that weight of woe ;
And to this day we think of Arnaut's rhyme
Whenever pity at the labouring heart
On fair Francesca's memory drops the rose.

Ah ! sovereign Love, forgive this weaker rhyme !
The men of old who sang were great at heart,
Yet have we too known woe, and worn thy rose.

RONDEAU.

Love should faint, and half decline
Below the fit meridian sign,
And shorn of all his golden dress,
His royal state and loveliness,
Be no more worth a heart like thine,
Let not thy nobler passion pine,
But with a charity divine,
Let Memory ply her soft address
If Love should faint ;
And oh ! this laggard heart of mine,
Like some halt pilgrim stirred with wine,

Shall ache in pity's dear distress,
Until the balms of thy caress
To work the finished cure combine,
If Love should faint.

RONDEL.

Underneath this tablet rest,
Grasshopper by autumn slain,
Since thine airy summer nest
Shivers under storm and rain.

Freely let it be confessed
Death and slumber bring thee gain ;
Spared from winter's fret and pain,
Underneath this tablet rest.

Myro found thee on the plain,
Bore thee in her lawny breast,

Reared this marble tomb amain
To receive so small a guest !
Underneath this tablet rest,
Grasshopper by autumn slain.

THE BALLAD OF DEAD CITIES.

TO A. L.

Where are the cities of the plain?
And where the shrines of rapt Bethel?
And Calah built of Tubal-Cain?
And Shinar whence King Amraphel
Came out in arms, and fought, and fell,
Decoyed into the pits of slime
By Siddim, and sent sheer to hell;
Where are the cities of old time?

Where now is Karnak, that great fane,
With granite built, a miracle?
And Luxor smooth without a stain,
Whose graven scripture still we spell?
The jackal and the owl may tell,
Dark snakes around their ruins climb,
They fade like echo in a shell;
Where are the cities of old time?

And where is white Shushan, again,
Where Vashti's beauty bore the bell,
And all the Jewish oil and grain
Were brought to Mithridath to sell,
Where Nehemiah would not dwell,
Because another town sublime
Decoyed him with her oracle?
Where are the cities of old time?

ENVOI.

Prince, with a dolorous, ceaseless knell
Above their wasted toil and crime
The waters of oblivion swell :
Where are the cities of old time?

MY OWN GRAVE.

IMITATED FROM RONSARD.

When all my life is done
Beneath the pleasant sun,
When cold are breath and limb,
And eyes grown dim,

Before the whole live air
Grows dead to me, prepare
A cover for my face,
A resting-place.

Yet raise no splendid tomb,
Nor o'er my dust find room
For blazoned words, but let
The world forget.

In some sequestered spot,
Apart, concealed, remote,
Blown round by multitudes
Of breezy woods,

Broad skies above my head,
Green turf my body's bed,
And, flowing by my side,
A river wide.

There let me too forget
All sorrow, pain and fret,
Made one with flowers and trees,
And blithe like these.

Green spring, and sunlight shed
On summer's golden head,
Rich autumn warm with light,
And winter white,

Will bring, with various cheer,
The sweet revolving year,
And I shall rest below
And scarcely know.

Yet haply, when there shoots
March life in crabbed roots,
My heart shall wake to feel
It upward steal.

The new-fledged birds shall bring
Me solace when they sing,
And stir the boughs that meet
Above my feet.

And when the bees in tune
Hum dreamily of June,
While over heaven on high
Soft clouds float by,

The long sweet grass will fade,
And in brown swathes be laid
By many a whistling scythe
Of mowers blithe;

The men will whistle too
Till twilight brings the dew,
Then leave the fallen grass
And homeward pass.

Their singing, low and sweet,
Vibration of their feet,
The sense of youth again,
Will sooth my brain.

With face and limbs and hair
Dark on the misty air,
They'll pass my dreaming eyes,
When daylight dies

And e'er September's wind
The elm-tree shade has thinned,
When rushes droop, and reeds
Shake out their seeds,

When autumn sunsets make
A glory through the brake,
And down the woodland glades
The amber fades,

Some maiden-heart on fire,
Shamed with her new desire,
Just waked to passionate will,
And trembling still,

Will come to hide her face
With all its girlish grace,
Where shining waters lave
My greenwood grave.

Her wealth of shining tress
And glowing cheek will bless
The cool fresh blades that start
Out of my heart.

There silent, hushed, alone,
No face to shame her own,
She'll give her quivering breast
One hour of rest.

And I, perchance, who know
So well the weal and woe
Of love, and oft before
Have taught its lore,

Through stress of love may gain
Some skill to quell her pain,
And send through blade and flower
Some magic power.

Howe'er it be, I know
That lying there below,
My quiet dust will stir
With joy in her ;

That all her youth will be
Like noonday rain to me,
Her beauty like the sun
When rain is done.

Then let them shed no tear
Who hold my memory dear,
But pass and leave me there,
In woodland air.

Hemmed round by birds and bees,
To haunt the murmuring trees,
When all this life is done
Beneath the sun.

A YEAR.

When the hot wasp hung in the grape last year,
And tendrils withered and leaves grew sere,
There was little to hope and nothing to fear,
  And the smouldering autumn sank apace,
And my heart was hollow and cold and drear.

When the last grey moth that November brings
Had folded its sallow and sombre wings,
Like the tuneless voice of a child that sings,
  A music arose in that desolate place,
A broken music of hopeless things.

But time went by, with the month of snows,
And the pulse and tide of that music rose ;
As a pain that fades is a pleasure that grows,
So hope sprang up with a heart of grace,
And love as a crocus-bud that blows.

And now I know when next autumn has dried
The sweet hot juice to the grape-skin's side,
And the new wasps dart where the old ones died,
My heart will have rest in one luminous face,
And its longing and yearning be satisfied.

BEACHY HEAD.

A crowd of butterflies that float
And flap and wheel in glancing light ;
And far away, but clear in sight
The passage of a white-winged boat ;

Great daisy-suns that learn by rote
The measure of their master's flight,
And fold their disks away at night,
To hoard their borrowed gold, and gloat.

White hands that smell of torn wild thyme,
  Dear hands that lightly lingering press,
What sea-cliff sounds made up your chime,

What flashing lights your soft caress,
  When trembling rapture faltered 'Yes!'
And all around us rang with rhyme?

A WINTER JINGLE.

The soft wind blows
Across the snows,
And turns the palest face to rose ;
The wind it goes
Where no one knows,
Like water round the world it flows ;
The sunlit air is warm and light
Though all the earth be wrapped in white.

But owlets shrill
Shriek round the hill
When twilight fades, and all is still ;

The keen gusts fill

The frozen rill

With treacherous snowdrifts deep and chill;

The wanderer findeth small delight

In crossing there at dead of night.

AT THE PLAY.

Dora seated at the play
  Weeps to see the hero perish,—
Hero of a Dresden day,
  Fit for china nymphs to cherish ;
O that Dora's heart would be
Half so soft and warm for me !

When the flaring lights are out
  His heroic deeds are over,
Gone his splendid strut and shout,
  Gone his raptures of a lover,
While my humdrum heart you'd find
True, though out of sight and mind.

THE LOSS OF THE 'EURYDICE.'

Tired with the toils that know no end,
On wintry seas long doomed to roam,
They smiled to think that March could lend
Such radiant winds to waft them home ;
Long perils overpast,
They stood for port at last,
Close by the fair familiar water-way,
And on their sunlit lee
All hearts were glad to see
The crags of Culver through the shining day ;

While every white-winged bird,
Whose joyous cry they heard,
Seemed wild to shout the welcome that it bore
Of love from friends on shore.

Ah! brief their joy, as days are brief
In March, that loves not joy or sun;
O bitter to the heart of grief
The port that never shall be won;
Fair ship, with all sail set,
Didst thou perchance forget
The changing times and treacherous winds of Spring?
And could those headlands grey
Rehearse no tale to-day,
Of wrecks they have seen, and many a grievous thing?
Thy towering cliff, Dunnose,
Full many a secret knows,—
Cry out in warning voice! too much they dare;
Death gathers in the air.

A wind blew sharp out of the north,
And o'er the island-ridges rose
A sound of tempest going forth,
And murmur of approaching snows.
Then through the sunlit air
Streamed dark the lifted hair
Of storm-cloud, gathering for the light's eclipse,
And fiercely rose and fell
The shriek of waves, the knell
Of seamen, and the doom of wandering ships;
As with an eagle's cry
The mighty storm rushed by,
Trailing its robe of snow across the wave,
And gulfed them like a grave.

It passed; it fell; and all was still;
But, homebound wanderers, where were they?
The wind went down behind the hill,
The sunset gilded half the bay.

Ah! loud bewildered sea,
Vain, vain our trust in thee
To bring our kinsfolk home, through storm and tide!
So sharp and swift the blow,
Thyself dost hardly know
Where now they rest whom thou didst bear and guide;
Our human hearts may break,
Cold Ocean, for thy sake,—
Thou not the less canst paint in colours fair
The eve of our despair.

Not hard for heroes is the death
That greets them from the cannon's lips,
When heaven is red with flaming breath,
And shakes with roar of sundering ships:
When through the thunder-cloud
Sounds to them, clear and loud,
The voice of England calling them by name;

And as their eyes grow dim
They hear their nation's hymn,
And know the prelude of immortal fame ;
But sad indeed is this
The meed of war to miss,
And die for England, but in dying know
They leave no name but woe.

They cannot rest through coming years,
In any ground that England owns,
And billows salter than our tears
Wash over their unhonoured bones ;
Yet in our hearts they rest
Not less revered and blest
Than those, their brothers, who in fighting fell ;
Nor shall our children hear
Their names pronounced less dear,
When England's roll of gallant dead we tell ;

For ever shall our ships,
There, at the Solent's lips,
Pass out to glory over their still bed,
And praise the silent dead.

THE BATH.

With rosy palms against her bosom pressed
To stay the shudder that she dreads of old,
Lysidice glides down, till silver-cold
The water girdles half her glowing breast:
A yellow butterfly on flowery quest
Rifles the roses that her tresses hold:
A breeze comes wandering through the fold on fold
Of draperies curtaining her shrine of rest.
Soft beauty, like her kindred petals strewed
Along the crystal coolness, there she lies.
What vision gratifies those gentle eyes?
She dreams she stands where yesterday she stood
Where, while the whole arena shrieks for blood,
Hot in the sand a gladiator dies.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.

1805—1875.

A being cleaves the moonlit air,
With eyes of dew and plumes of fire,
New-born, immortal, strong and fair;
Glance ere he goes!
His feet are shrouded like the dead,
But in his face a wild desire
Breaks like the dawn that flushes red,
And like a rose.

The stars shine out above his path,
And music wakes through all the skies;
What mortal such a triumph hath,
By death set free?

What earthly hands and heart are pure
As this man's, whose unshrinking eyes
Gaze onward through the deep obscure,
Nor quail to see?

Ah! this was he who drank the fount
Of wisdom set in speechless things,
Who, patient, watched the day-star mount,
While others slept.
Ah! this was he whose loving soul
Found heart-beats under trembling wings,
And heard divinest music roll
Where wild springs leapt.

For poor dumb lips had songs for him
And children's dreamings ran in tune,
And strange old heroes, weird and dim,
Walked by his side.

The very shadows loved him well
And danced and flickered in the moon,
And left him wondrous tales to tell
Men far and wide.

And now no more he smiling walks
Through greenwood alleys full of sun,
And, as he wanders, turns and talks,
Though none be there;
The children watch in vain the place
Where they were wont, when day was done,
To see their poet's sweet worn face,
And faded hair.

Yet dream not such a spirit dies,
Though all its earthly shrine decay!
Transfigured under clearer skies,
He sings anew;

The frail soul-covering, racked with pain,
And scored with vigil, fades away,
The soul set free and young again
Glides upward through.

Weep not; but watch the moonlit air!
Perchance a glory like a star
May leave what hangs about him there,
And flash on us! . . .
Behold! the void is full of light,
The beams pierce heaven from bar to bar,
And all the hollows of the night
Grow luminous!

EROS.

Within a forest as I strayed,
Far down a sombre autumn glade,
I found the god of love ;
His bow and arrows cast aside,
His lovely arms extended wide,
A depth of leaves above,
Beneath o'erarching boughs he made
A place for sleep in russet shade.

His lips, more red than any rose,
Were like a flower that overflows
With honey pure and sweet ;

And, clustering round that holy mouth,
The golden bees in eager drouth
Plied busy wings and feet;
They knew, as every lover knows,
There's no such honey-bloom that blows.

ON DARTMOOR.

I.

Warm tissue of refulgent vapour fills
The valley southward to the hurrying stream,
Whose withered and sun-wasted waters gleam
Meandering downwards through the terraced hills ;
Here, even here, the hand of man fulfils
Its daily toil, for though alone I seem
I hear the clangour of a far-off team,
And men that shout above the shouting rills ;
Nor jars this noise of labour on mine ear,
Nor seem, because of these, the spirits less near
That animate the mountains and the skies,
The selfsame heart of nature shineth clear
Through filmy garments of a golden sphere
And earnest looks of humble human eyes.

II.

A soft grey line of haze subdues the west
That was so rosy half-an-hour ago ;
The moaning night-breeze just begins to blow,
And now the team that ploughed the mountain's breast
Cease their long toil, and dream of home and rest ;
Now, giant-like, the tall young ploughmen go
Between me and the sunset, footing slow ;
My spirit, as an uninvited guest,
Goes with them, wondering what desire, what aim,
May stir their hearts and mine with common flame,
Or, thoughtless, do their hands suffice their soul?
I know not, care not, for I deem no shame
To hold men, flowers, and trees and stars the same,
Myself, as these, one atom in the whole.

MAY MORNING.

Break, long wave, below my feet!
Wind and meet,
Sea-streams that the moon hath shaken!
From the shingle white and bare,
All the air
With sonorous cadence waken!

From the distance dim and bright,
Gulphed in light,
To the long spent wave that dashes,
All the sea shines through and through
Fiery blue:
When the wind is up, it flashes.

And the milder heaven above,
Full of love,
Smiles upon the rolling ocean,
Like a woman's heart content
To be spent
And absorbed in sweet devotion.

Surely Venus through the sea,
Clear and free,
Rose on such a morn as this is,
Called her doves about her there,
Heard the air
Murmur through their wings like kisses.

Out of cold green depths of foam,
Sea-nymphs' home,
To the live air, red with roses,
Came she, clothed about with light,
Warm and white,
Like a moon the mist encloses.

Like a summer moon whose limbs,
As she swims
Ever up in the pale æther,
Cast their lawny veils aside
Till they hide
Nought from the mad earth beneath her.

Though no more with reverent eyes,
Sadly wise,
Sea and air to us are holy,
Born too late for gods to bless,
We profess
To be disenchanted wholly,

Though the nymphs are dead, and we
Cannot see,
Plunging in the gulfs of azure,
Long processions, gods in line,
Half divine,
Blowing horns of mellow leisure,

Yet the old sweet creeds and we
Cannot be
Always so far rent asunder,
Since we feel on such a morn
Life reborn
In the antique world of wonder.

SERENADE.

The lemon-petals gently fall
Within the windless Indian night,
The wild liana'd waterfall
Hangs, lingering like a ghostly light;
Drop down to me, and linger long, my heart's entire delight!

Among the trees, the fiery flies
Move slowly in their robes of flame;
Above them, through the liquid skies,
The stars in squadrons do the same;
Move through the garden down to me, and softly speak my name!

By midnight's moving heart that shakes
The coloured air and kindling gloom,
By all the forms that beauty takes
In fruit, in blossom, in perfume,
Come down and still the aching doubts that haunt me and consume!

Else if the chilly morning break,
And thou hast heard my voice in vain,
Unmoved as is a forest-lake
That through the branches hears the rain,
Beware lest Love himself pass by to bless thee, and—refrain!

THE NEW ENDYMION.

Behind the ghostly poplar-trees
  The moon rose high when Celia died ;
To win the flickering midnight breeze
  I'd thrown the curtains both aside,
And this was how I came to see
In my most tearless agony
The red moon in the poplar-tree.

The scent of lilies, sickly sweet,
  Just floated through the shining air,
And the hot perfume of the wheat
  Hung like a vapour everywhere ;

The anguish of the summer night,
Close, breathless, sultry, still and bright,
Seemed without hope and infinite.

But most the round orb of the moon,
That one by one the branches kissed,
Drawn out of her flushed waking swoon,
And changed to gold above the mist,
Seemed like a rancorous enemy,
Who climbed by stairs into the sky
Better to see my darling die.

And I remembered, hushed at heart,
Without a tear, though she was dead,—
As if my future had no part
In that cold past upon the bed,—
I thought how much the moon had seen
Of happy days that lay between
The sweet may-be and sad has-been.

Quivering to feel how, every time
I forged another link of love,
The mystic moon had seemed to climb,
And watch my lips, and hang above ;
I shuddered, and my thoughts I cast,
While all my veins were beating fast,
Across my memories of the past.

I thought of that clear tropic night,
When, like a bird, through Indian seas,
Our ship unfolded wings of light,
And lost the land by soft degrees :
She paced the deck ; I heard the stir
Of robes, her beauty's minister,
And at the last I spoke to her.

But while our budding fortunes crossed,
Amid her courteous flights of speech,
My careless vision slowly lost
The range of palm-trees on the beach,

Whereat another light began
Behind the isles of Andaman,
And up the golden moonlight ran.

I turned and saw her gentle face,
  Those violet moon-shot eyes I saw,
And in that very hour and place
  Bent like a vassal to her law ;
But yet I dared not speak, and soon
She rose and suddenly had gone
And left me to the florid moon.

I thought me of a winter street,
  And how the first time, on my arm,
I felt her gentle pulses beat
  As in a virgin vague alarm ;
We let the rest pass on before,
And talking lingered, more and more
Hid in the city's kindly roar.

The great crowd caught us in its net,
And pressed us closer to each other;
We spoke of all since last we met,
And laughed like sister and like brother;
I all the while, with fixed intent,
Towards some more serious silence bent
To say a certain thing I meant.

In vain,—till out of the blue night,
Behind the vast cathedral spire,
There swam into our sudden sight
A globe of honey-coloured fire,
And in the wonder of the view
She hushed her talking, and I knew
How kind her heart was and how true.

I thought, too, of the magic hour
When in one sacred chamber bound,
She loosed her wreath of orange-flower,
And dropped her wealth of hair uncrowned,

And I, with tenderest fingers laced
About the slimness of her waist,
Her cool and cream-white throat embraced.

And through this window-pane we glanced
  And saw the silvery soft may-moon,—
Like some young mænad that hath danced
  Till her bright head is in a swoon,—
Lean up against the poplar-tree,
And in the wild wind we could see
The leaves fold round her amorously.

They folded round as sisters might
  Around a maiden sick to death,
Whom some perfidious churl and light
  Had cheated with delusive breath :
The moon's white face that golden hour
Had something of the tints that lour
About the aconite in flower.

Yet that last night when Celia died
The moon's face had a stranger air,
A mien of victory, like a bride,
Enchanted, resolute and fair;
Through all my sorrow, all my pain,
I gazed upon the orb again,
Till my pent anguish gushed in rain;

And then upon her face I fell,
My sweet, lost Celia's, and my arms
Clasped round once more the miracle
Of her divine and tender charms;
The room grew dark, I knew not why,—
I gazed and saw that, suddenly,
The moon was ashy in the sky.

Then I arose and left the dead,
And wandered up into the wood,
Till briar and honeysuckle shed
A subtle odour where I stood;

And there, between the boughs that lie
Thin-leaved against the stars on high,
The moon swam down the liquid sky.

And since that night of pain and love
I have not felt as others feel,
An alien in their courts I move,
And from their noisy world I steal;
The common ways of life I shun,
And quit my comrades every one,
And live sequestered from the sun.

But when the crescent moon begins
To fill her slender bow with fire,
A dream upon my fancy wins,
I languish with a fond desire;
I stride along the mountain-tops,
But when behind their range she drops,
My heart within me leaps and stops.

But every month one night I lie
Upon the wild back of the hills,
And watch the hollow of the sky
Until the crystal dew distils ;
And when the perfect moon appears
A golden paragon of spheres,
I rise a god among my peers.

Twelve times within the weary year
That marvellous hour of joy returns,
And till its rapture reappear
My pulse is like a flame that burns ;
I have no wonder, now, nor care
For any woman's hands or hair,
For any face, however fair.

Ah ! what am I that she should bend
Her glorious godship down to me ?
My mortal weakness cannot lend
Fresh light to her vast deity !

I know not! only this I know—
She loves me, she has willed it so,
And blindly in her light I go.

Sweet, make me as a mountain pool
With thy soft radiance mirrored o'er,
Or like the moon-fern, grey and cool,
That hides thy virtue in its core;
I must grow old and pass away;
Thou art immortal; love, I pray,
Bend o'er me on my fatal day!

THE WAKING OF EURYDICE.

ORPHEUS.

Goddess, with the torn pomegranate in that white immortal hand,

Quivering, with a chord's vibrations, at thy fatal throne I stand!

I have braved the raucous horror, I have cleft the streams of woe,

And my living locks are whitened with their grey and sluggish flow;

Proud I might be of endurance, high of heart to find my feet

Strong to bear me, queen and goddess, to thine awful judgment-seat,

But the soul in me is quiet and the spirit in me dies
Underneath the cold still flaming of those dark impassive eyes.
Let me speak, then, lest I perish, lest the lyre that brought me hither
Snap its strings, and lose its cunning, and be like a leaf and wither,
For the lyre alone sustains me, and without this breathing shell
I had died upon the upland and the moaning wastes of hell.

PERSEPHONE.

Mortal, speak, and spend no accents on the prelude of thy prayer,
Sovereign knowledge crowns my queenship to the utmost bounds of air.

ORPHEUS.

None have wit to pierce the darkness if thou veil thine
awful eyes,
None can hide his heart, I know it, if their clear effulgence rise ;
In the fringes of thine eyelids light is born to beam on
man,
And without it he may stumble through the night-time as
he can,
Bare my senses crowd before thee, on my burning spirit
read,
Sculptured, like a rune on marble, all the woes that
make it bleed ;
Few the words, but long their burden, brief the tale, but
sad to see,
Graven with a world of anguish, and the name
Eurydice.

PERSEPHONE.

Sweetest ghost, around whose shadow just so much of beauty clings
As a faded jonquil gathers in its sad grey petal wings,
Fairest of the weightless number that with mute beseeching hand
Drop the obolus and vanish when the wherry comes to land ;
Sighing like a wind they vanish, and before my feet they fail.
Ruddy mortal, say, what would'st thou with a soul so thin and pale !

ORPHEUS.

Goddess wiser than the wisest of the gods of upper air,
Torture not my soul within me, thou canst read its sorrow there.

Through my veins the blood is beating, life and youth
are slaves to me,
But the triple world contains not what can solace me but
she.
She is but a wandering spirit in a molten land of
dreams,
Like the phantom of a blossom to thine own clear sense
she seems,
Wasted is she, like a wine-draught that an old blind
priest would pour,
When he stumbles, and it passes, and no god may taste
it more.
Hollow sounds this strand of echoes, and the winds of
Acheron
As about a pineless mountain round its crowded banks
are blown,
For the souls that cluster thickly are too faint and slight
to shiver,

And the wind goes whistling through them by the cold and sullen river.

Little glory, thrice-crowned goddess, such a handmaid brings to thee ;

Yield her, O be great, and master her o'ermastering destiny !

PERSEPHONE.

Poignant is the voice that utters, seldom in these courts combine

Words that bear so live a passion with a note so masculine ;

I could smile to hear thee pleading, for my heart well nigh forgets

What a weight there is in glory and how queenship wears and frets.

Such a voice, full-toned and virile, I have scarcely heard again

Since I stood a maid with maidens on the lily-woven plain,

And behind me down the valley heard the breath of steeds, and found

One who spake in amorous accents with broad arms about me wound.

Thou hast won thy suit, musician, and I grant thee leave to try

If to live on earth be sweeter to a spirit than to die.

Tune thy chords and wield the plectrum ; on my throne I sit apart ;

Draw her ghost to stand before us by the witchcraft of thine art ;

She herself, not I, shall teach thee what may be her own desire,

Win her if thou canst with pleading on thy tense impassioned lyre.

ORPHEUS.

Ah ! I see the cloud dividing ; through the liquid gloom
appears,
Like the crescent moon seen faintly through a hopeless
mist of tears,
One that glides among the shadows, and has left the
serried line :
Spirit, lift thine eyes and fix them on these aching eyes
of mine !
Lo ! I stir remembrance in thee by the endless throb and
motion
Of the dolphin-haunted channels of thy blue Ionian
ocean,
By the rosy peaks of Chios, by thy father's snow-white sail
Hastening home past granite headlands and before a
southern gale,
By the shining sands that glittered with their dust of
chrysoprase,

When we first gazed each at other in that silent, sunlit place,
By the blush that mounted o'er thee, by the kindling of those eyes,
Lit by no such flames as these are, but the liquidest of skies!
Child, remember life at waking and forget the dream of this!
Cool the wind, but warm the sea was, oh! how warm our tender kiss;
Grey and wan those lips of thine now, but my living lips are red,
And to thrill thy mouth with colour but a whisper needs be said.

EURYDICE.

Pray me not to speak that whisper, thou whose words sound harsh and loud!
Dim and vague all worldly memories on my weary fancy crowd;

Yes! 'tis true; and I remember; oh! be that enough
for thee!
Boundless space and time unmeasured lie between thy
voice and me.
I am troubled at its ardour; O believe me, it were
best
To return and stir no longer in the silence of my
rest.
Once I was thy bride, it may be; I am now the bride of
Death,
Vexed no more with throbbing pulses, led by no mad
mortal breath;
Vain those hands that stretch to seize me, vain those
pleading lips and eyes,
I am but the shade of shadows and a wandering wind of
sighs.
In the urn of brass that moulders in our garden year by
year,
There is more of me to echo to thine ecstasy than here;

And the dying grasp that gathered close around thy answering hand

Said farewell, farewell for ever, if thy heart could understand.

ORPHEUS.

Ah! the shape, the faultless beauty, ah! the gracious lines I see,

Rounded arm and waving bosom, 'tis indeed Eurydice!

White, indeed, with more of lustre than befits a living form,

But the lights of hell are lurid in this hollow vault of storm.

Ah! the face is hers, I know it, but the voice is hard to tell,

Other were the words it uttered when it bade me last farewell.

When they poured the last libation, and with myrtles full of dew

Sprinkled lightly those cold fingers, and then hid them
from my view,
When the mourners left the doorway and went slowly
down the hill,
I was master of my anguish, for I heard thy whisper still ;
But the voice that comes to meet me through this hollow
land and drear,
Is as empty and as chilly as the wind that wanders here.
Thou hast drunk the icy waters of the dull Lethæan spring,
And thy memories fade and falter, thou art slowly
withering ;
Dolorous are the streams of Lethe, poor the gifts they
have to give,—
Gaze on me, and strain thy utmost, and remember life
and live !

EURYDICE.

Did this hand so pale and fragile lie within the grasp of
thine ?

Was thy breath upon my spirit like a burning draught of wine?

Did I pledge my soul to love thee, yea! within the halls of hell?

Ah! a woman's vow is nothing, like an autumn flower it fell.

Once those eyes could move me strangely, and those hands across the lyre

Led my beating heart and plunged it in a well of living fire;

Now thy spirit scarcely moves me through the crystal of thy tears,

And thy lyre-strings crack with passion, but the soul is dead that hears.

ORPHEUS.

Nay, not dead, since memory wakens! Golden shell, I call to thee!

Cry as when the pine-trees heard thee on the snows of Rhodope,

When thy music lashed to frenzy in their hollow marble lairs

Lions of the Thracian upland, and the rugged heart of bears ;

Harder now the task before thee, toil more arduous, more sublime,

To awake a soul that slumbers by the mastery of rhyme.

Now beneath my fingers quicken, leap to life, wild strings, and be

Not a tool to work my fancy, but a throbbing part of me ;

Softly move with rising measure, like the tide upon the shore,

Lapping on the sands and darkening their white surface more and more,

Rising, till, almost unheeded, with its moaning weight of waves,

Crest on crest, the sea o'erpowers us, as our last retreat it laves !

Mildly mount in gathering music as the snow-white
flakes of cloud
Branch across the summer heaven till its blue expanse
they shroud,
Scarcely noted in their lustre, blanched and pure without
a stain,
Till they blacken in a moment and o'erwhelm us with the
rain !
Hover poised, in air, vibrating, as the eagle hangs
aloft,
With his brazen wings half viewless in the coloured sky
and soft,
Waiting with a gentle motion, till the fateful moment
come,
Like a bolt to thunder downward on the quarry still and
dumb !
So, but with a subtler motion, with insistence more in-
tense,

Pierce a path, my lyre, with music to her inmost secret
sense ;
Thrill her soul with tenderest memories of a nobler life
than this,
Whisper to her of the fullness of our first enfolding
kiss,
Let her see the spicy torches, let her mark the friends
that fled,
Laughing folds of radiant purple round our rosy marriage
bed,
Fear that faded into rapture, as the night must fade in
day,
All the holy rites and secret that the priests of Love
obey !
Sound, and if her shade awake not, nor take form of life
again,
Phoibos' self might wake the echoes of his Helicon in
vain.

EURYDICE.

Ah! the roots that bud with summer when they feel the creeping rain,—

And the tingling pulse that thrills me, half with pleasure, half with pain!

Ah! the secret fields of ocean, in their stirless hyaline,

When the skirts of storm sweep by them,—and this shaken heart of mine!

O forbear and leave me painless, as in time gone past I was,

When my face found no reflection in the water's sheeny glass!

Hot and wild this tide returning, sore the shock wherewith it strains

This poor fount of life that murmurs in its coil of swelling veins!

Shades that hover round the circles of the nine rings of the river,

Come and free me, come in legions, crowd around me,
and deliver!

Ah! have pity, Love, and leave me, turn away that long-
ing face,—

Or unclose your arms and fold me in an infinite em-
brace!

EPILOGUE.

As one whom care and noisy thoughts distress
Puts out from shore and sees the land grow less,
Delights to feel the sea so gray and vast,
But riots in its wealth of light at last;
So he whose soul the voids of manhood fret,
Who sees the suns that rose beside him set,
Who pales beneath the midnight lamp to find
The painted face of fame, with death behind,
Who learns that love may in a moment end,
And falsehood tarnish the clear name of friend,
Who saps the gilded world, and knows too well
That all is finite, all is mutable,—
Him nothing more can solace or appease,
No tedious counsels point the way to ease,
Unless his wounded heart be framed like those
Round whom the bounteous arms of nature close;
But if of these he be! ah! strange delight
To pass from garish day to tender night!

To feel the cool and changeless earth contend
With calm revolving skies to be his friend;
To watch each flower in fading, and to trust
'Twill soon reanimate the same dim dust:
In all the voiceless life that round him flows
To feel the same serene and staid repose!

He flies the sunlight in its summer strength,
And in a twilight forest flings his length,
Feels silence first, and then in quiet mood,
Drinks in the noiseless music of the wood;
He joys to feel once more the generous heat
Of nature's bosom pulsing at his feet,
Grows blithe and pure as her mute nurselings do,
And wise to penetrate 'twixt false and true,
Till all the wounds that tore his spirit healed,
And something of their meaning half revealed,
He gathers courage, and, with sober mind,
Comes back refreshed to combat with his kind.

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